The weekly Standard

JULY 28, 2008

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THE PERILS OF HONESTY
ANDREW FERGUSON

THE FUTURE OF IRAQ

The decline of violence, the rise of politics

BY KIMBERLY KAGAN

Iraqi policemen form a human pyramid during a ceremony in the province of Diwaniya, south of Baghdad, July 16.

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In the new issue of the Hoover Digest . . .

The Coming Tax Hike—and How to Head it Off

Disrupting our economy while leaving the deficit virtually untouched? Not a good idea.

As the presidential campaign enters its endgame, expect more debate over budget priorities and how to pay for them. Do we need tax hikes to restore near-term budget balance and finance longer-term entitlement growth? In a word, no. Such claims fail both budget arithmetic and economic sense. Worse, they undercut the nation's fiscal policies and its commitment to economic growth.

Federal revenues are already high, yet we stand on the verge of a very large tax increase if the Bush tax cuts expire. The personal income tax burden would rise to its highest point in history, relative to GDP. Economic damage caused by the tax increases and tax-avoidance behavior would choke off any promised revenues (and, more immediately, hobble the eventual economic recovery). Meanwhile, the lure of higher revenues would sustain Congress's wasteful ways. A better idea is to fix entitlements to slow their cost growth, cut nonessential spending, and promote economic growth: the greater the growth, the larger the pie.

— By John F. Cogan and R. Glenn Hubbard

A Modest Proposal for Middle East Peace

How to get through to Israel? Let places such as Kashmir, Cyprus, and Tibet lead the way.

Maybe it's time for a new, global approach to Israel and its occupation. Let's get the whole world talking about disputed capitals, the right of return for refugees, land under occupation, the creation of artificial post–World War II states, and the use of force against suspected Islamist terrorists. But why not make it interesting? Let's look for solutions to apply everywhere, not just in Israel.

Perhaps the world could impose a big-power "road map" on long-divided Cyprus. Or relieve all displaced populations—the Germans expelled from East Prussia, this Indians uprooted from ancestral homes in what is now Pakistan, the half-million Jews deported from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, and Syria after 1967. Can we promise them all the right to return? Then there's lost territory—much of Azerbaijan taken by Armenia, Tibet swallowed up by China—and artificial states (should Pakistan even exist? North Korea?). Surely the world that solves these problems will have much to teach Israel about humility and concessions.

—Paul R. Gregory

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the weekly Standard

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Obamaweek

Last week on this page, we published an imaginary memo from an Obama adviser urging the Chosen One to speak at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. It concluded: "If this doesn't get you back on the cover of *Newsweek*, nothing will!"

We were wrong! Our July 21 issue of *Newsweek* arrived two days later with You'll Never Guess Who on the cover, and he hadn't even left yet for his Summer of Self-Love World Tour (featuring appearances in Jordan, the West Bank, Baghdad, Kabul, London, Paris, and Berlin, with occasional cameo roles for the Three Little Network Anchors Who Tagged Along).

Engineers, in the aerospace industry and elsewhere, calculate something called the "mean time between failures." The Scrapbook has made an analogous calculation—what we term the Mean Time Between *Newsweek* Obama Covers (MTBNOC). We can reveal here the results of our preliminary investigations, which show that the MTBNOC is falling at an alarming rate.

In mid-October, by our back-of-the-envelope extrapolation, every issue of *Newsweek* will feature His Self-Importance on the cover. Shortly thereafter, if our calculations are correct, the magazine will be forced to appear more frequently—twice a week, at first, and as a rebranded *Newsdaily* by early November, in order to accomodate the increasingly frequent need of editors to showcase Barack-the-Transcendent on their cover. Uncertainty is introduced into the equation at that point owing to Election Day, when the American people are allowed to weigh in with their own judgment on the merits of their prospective savior. Should the voters unaccountably fail to do their duty, some predict *Newsweek* may suspend publication in protest. ♦

July 16, 2007

January 14, 2008

March 31, 2008

May 19, 2008

June 2, 2008

July 21, 2008

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(Classic Steiner, reprinted from our issue of August 12, 2002)

Sentences We Didn't Finish

"The story of Obama's religious journey is a uniquely American tale. It's one of a seeker, an intellectually curious young man trying to cobble together a religious identity out of myriad influences. Always drawn to life's Big Questions, Obama embarked on a spiritual quest in which he tried to reconcile his rational side with his yearning for transcendence. He found Christ—but that hasn't stopped him from . . ."

Lisa Miller and Richard Wolffe, Newsweek, *July 21, 2008*

Cue Violins

According to the Writers Guild of America, working conditions on *American Idol* are "unsafe." WGAW president Patric M. Verrone, in an email to union members on July 15, promises an "American Idol Truth Tour" to publicize the "unsafe conditions" on the show. Our sympathies are naturally with the writers. We're not sure if the risk is black lung from breathing the fumes emitted by Paula Abdul, mayhem at the hands of Simon Cowell, or an attack by all those "dawgs" Randy Jackson keeps referring to, but we're hard pressed to think of a more urgent issue facing organized labor in this country. ♦

No Kidding

"Clinton Not Eager to Send Back Cash" (*Washington Post* headline, July 16, 2008) ♦

Preemie Losers

We sense the birth, so to speak, of a new interest group. A new study, reports *USA Today*, indicates that adults who were born prematurely are not only more shy than the rest of us but also less likely to have sex and get married: "The earlier babies are born, the less likely they are to marry, become parents or earn a high salary, suggests a study of nearly 1 million Norwegians, now ages 20 to 36, in today's *New England Journal of Medicine*." In addition, "In two studies of people in their early 20s in this month's *Pediatrics*, researchers found that former preemies were less likely to leave home, live with a romantic partner or be sexually active. "

The preemies, however, rallied on the comments section at AOL (which republished the story)—insisting that they do date, are intimate, and are really, really outgoing. As BigBroFla put it, "I was born 8 weeks early, 3.2 pounds. I am 42, not very shy, have my own business, many friends, never been arrested, married 10 years, pretty darn healthy, and don't even get me started about my sex drive!" (On the other hand, another reader says that if the study is accurate, he plans on inducing labor for his wife if the baby is a girl, so as to delay her sexual activity.) ♦

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Casual

Got Smart

When it comes to wheels, I'm a small car man. Always have been, always will be. Automotively speaking, I really do believe that small is beautiful. Not for everyone, of course, but unquestionably for me.

Psychiatrists may make of this what they will: I tend to prefer smaller to larger working spaces, tiny shops to grandiose showrooms, miniatures to giant replicas. Some months ago I was offered a (marginally) larger office here at The Weekly Standard, but that would have meant abandoning my current premises, where it grows increasingly difficult to turn around. Widescreen TVs, cathedral ceilings, the Big Sky country of Montana—all leave me cold. Put me in a sleeping-car roomette to Rhode Island, or perhaps Delaware, with a transistor radio for company, and I'm happy.

All of which leads to: my new SmartCar. These radically diminutive, two-seat, three-cylinder bugs—manufactured by Daimler and ubiquitous in Europe—had me thinking envious thoughts when traveling in, say, Germany. So when I read last summer—while flying in a jumbo jet, by the way—that SmartCars were going to be marketed in the United States, I signed up online as soon as I could, paid the $99 registration fee, and awaited delivery.

After ten years of contentedly driving my 1998 Honda Civic Hatchback—the smallest car available at the time—around town, I had decided that it was time for something new. This was no reflection on the workmanlike Honda, which, as Hondas tend to do, keeps on going and going, mileage notwithstanding—and indeed, will now be driven by my son. But the Honda, for all its virtues, is a decidedly plain form of transportation, and having driven a few eccentric automobiles in my time, I thought I had earned the right, at my advanced age, to indulge myself.

Unfortunately, the Mini Cooper, an obvious alternative, had arrived in America when my Honda was still comparatively new. And Toyota, my alluring wife's brand of choice, now produces a suitably microscopic two-door model called the Yaris. I confess that I was strongly tempted by the Yaris, especially when the SmartCar's delivery to these shores was repeatedly delayed; but while the Yaris is, no doubt, a fine car, and small by any standard, it does not exactly turn heads when driven down the boulevard.

DARREN GYGI

Well, having finally taken delivery of my SmartCar—white with black roof and trim—in late May, I can attest that it does, in fact, turn heads. And attracts small crowds in parking lots, inspires shouted questions at traffic lights, produces smiles on distracted faces, and gets pointed out routinely in the city and on the highway.

I drove a 1929 Model A Ford coupe (with rumble seat) in high school, and a 1967 Morris Minor (painted white) when I lived in Los Angeles and New England, so I am not unaccustomed to driving a car that attracts attention, even derision. But my SmartCar is in something of a category by itself. I don't know how long the novelty will persist—they are still rare in these precincts—but it is an unusual intersection where I don't provide information about gas mileage (approximately 44 mpg) or exchange grins and nods. If I sit by the window in my hometown Starbucks nearly every passerby will circle my SmartCar in the parking lot and peer inside. Taxi drivers are suddenly friendly and inquisitive; soccer moms in vans seem to find me amusing. Only cops tend to scowl.

I confess there are moments when it is mildly disconcerting to be zooming across, say, K Street in downtown Washington with hordes of pedestrians pointing at me and my car, smiling or laughing and nudging companions. If I am some distance from them I can see the word "SmartCar" forming on lips; if closer I will hear "There's a SmartCar!" or "What's that?" Of course, this appeals to whatever theatricality lurks in my soul, but it also makes me slightly self-conscious. One tends not to yawn or pick one's nose under the circumstances.

As I say, at some point the spectacle will grow routine, and I may lapse gracefully back into anonymity. But in the meantime I have made one pertinent observation. I had asked the salesman what kind of person buys a SmartCar, and, somewhat to my surprise, he told me that "the demographic is men between 40 and 55 who want a toy." I can attest to this: Older men ask a thousand questions and look wistful, while their wives look askance and inquire about safety. Yet not long ago my wife and I were cruising down the highway, and in a neighboring car, a hijab-clad matron in her sixties smiled broadly and gave me the thumbs-up sign.

"See?" I said. "Even Muslims like the SmartCar."

Philip Terzian

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Challenging Gore

In challenging the Monday-morning quarterbacking over military tactics in Afghanistan and Iraq, Reuel Marc Gerecht ("Are We Safer?" June 30) asks, "If Al Gore had been president, would he have overruled General [Tommy] Franks's casualty-averse, Special Forces-on-horseback, airpower-heavy approach to the Afghan war?"

I agree with Gerecht that Gore would not have done so, for the simple reason that he would not have had to confront the question. We act as if the war in Afghanistan was a *fait accompli*, but it was not. Al Gore might have very well not attacked, but instead dealt with the problem like his predecessor Bill Clinton, as a police/intelligence matter.

Evan Winer
Evanston, Ill.

Depicting "Bubba"

Matt Labash evoked an excellent understanding of "Mudcat" Saunders and his ideas on how best to woo the Appalachian vote ("When Bubba Meets Obama," June 30). However, I was particularly impressed with Thomas Fluharty's cover illustration for the article.

As something of a "Bubba" myself, I can attest that Fluharty managed to capture the essence of the men with whom I've spent many enjoyable hours in Texas and the inland counties of California. Of course, the sketch was a caricature and not every "Bubba" sports a trucker tan or a Skoal can in the back pocket of his camo cut-offs, but on top of the remarkable detail it was close enough to correct to give me more than one chuckle.

Mike Harris
Seattle, Wash.

A Blood Libel

Anne-Elisabeth Moutet's story ("L'Affaire Enderlin," July 7 / July 14) is about a secondary issue: the reaction of French elites to an attack on one of their own. But the al-Dura story itself is, as Melanie Phillips and others have written, a blood libel, and as with that calumny, proving one incident to be false does little to change the underlying belief in the claims of murderous Israeli practices.

There was something fishy about the al-Dura story from the very beginning. Just look at the famous pictures. First, the father is crouching behind a concrete barrier supposedly with gunfire aimed at him. If so, why is his head above the barrier most of the time? Not exactly the position of someone trying to protect himself. But worse is the position of the

boy. What father would not have placed the boy up against the barrier and thrown his own body over his son to shield him from the bullets? Did this father not care about his son? More likely, the boy is positioned to be visible for the cameras. There is no other explanation, and Palestinians should have been embarrassed by the pictures from the start. That no one saw what was staring them in the face is appalling and speaks to the effect of years of anti-Israeli propaganda pushed in the media.

There is a desperate need to continue to publicize the truth about this incident and about the overwhelming decency and humanity of Israel's soldiers.

Joseph Shier
Toronto

Votes of the Faithful

Ryan T. Anderson's article, "McCain, Obama, & the Catholic Vote" (July 7 / July 14), provides a good overview of the issues that will guide Catholic voters this fall. However, the only issues at stake in this election that the Catholic Church holds as untenable are abortion rights, embryo destruction, cloning, and same-sex marriage. The other issues Anderson mentions are open to debate to faithful Catholics; therefore, a faithful Catholic should decide to vote based on the above untenable issues. This allows no question for whom to vote for the office of the presidency. I will be voting for John McCain in November even though I do disagree with him on such debatable issues as immigration policy and global warming.

Jeanette Holm
Mandan, N.D.

Ryan T. Anderson's article on the November Catholic vote is just about the most balanced writing I have come across anywhere in the media on this issue. If only the liberal outlets would print it!

Lottie Olender
Wallington, N.J.

Time to Go Home?

Regarding Fred Barnes's "Very Retiring Republicans" (July 7 / July 14): How very disappointing to learn that our elected Republican representatives must have positions of power in order to have job satisfaction. All these years I thought they wanted to be elected to represent (as the name of the position implies) their constituency. Perhaps they do need a job in the real world!

Sue Hostetter
Piqua, Ohio

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the weekly Standard

'Stunningly Shameful'

On January 23, 2008, during her keynote speech at the glitzy World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Condoleezza Rice made a surprisingly friendly gesture to the Iranian regime. She said, in this final year of the Bush administration, Iran and the United States could move towards a "new, more normal relationship."

There was one condition.

> Should Iran suspend its uranium enrichment and reprocessing activities—which is an international demand, not just an American one—then we could begin negotiations, and we could work over time to build a new, more normal relationship.

One day earlier the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council had agreed in principle to new sanctions in the face of continued Iranian intransigence on its nuclear weapons program. The Security Council had approved similar measures twice in the previous 13 months, and this third round of sanctions, Rice said, was necessary because of "Iran's unwillingness to suspend its enrichment and reprocessing of uranium."

In an interview with The Weekly Standard in May, she reiterated this point. "We will negotiate with them if they suspend their enrichment and reprocessing activities and start down a different road."

In testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee in mid-July, Undersecretary of State William Burns affirmed the Bush administration's unequivocal position.

> What we've made clear, along with the P-5 plus one partners, our willingness to negotiate directly with Iran about the nuclear issue, and that's laid out now in three Security Council resolutions. It's premised on Iran's meeting its international obligation to suspend enrichment and reprocessing. So we're ready, with our partners, to engage directly with Iran on that basis.

But last week the Bush administration abruptly refined that position—as Barack Obama might put it. Without any indication that Iran was suspending its uranium enrichment program, the State Department announced that Burns would be heading to Switzerland for direct meetings with Iran's nuclear negotiators.

So what changed? Very little.

In the weeks leading up to the State Department's announcement, Iran had been deliberately provocative. At a Kuala Lumpur summit for developing nations, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad warned of George W. Bush's "satanic desires." Iran test-fired long-range missiles, including the Shahab-3, which is capable of striking Israel. And a few days after that, it rejected a generous aid offer from our European allies—backed by the State Department—that included nuclear fuel, assistance on a nuclear reactor, and improved trade and diplomatic relations, if the Iranian regime would simply suspend its uranium enrichment program.

The State Department response wasn't to get tough. Instead, Condoleezza Rice directed her diplomats to simply drop the one precondition for engagement that we had insisted on for years and in effect reward these provocations.

But, it's not just Iran.

On October 9, 2006, North Korea tested a nuclear weapon. The next morning George W. Bush condemned this "provocative act" and warned against proliferation. "The transfer of nuclear weapons or material by North Korea to states or nonstate entities would be considered a grave threat to the United States and we would hold North Korea fully accountable." He rejected North Korean requests for direct meetings. "Obviously, I made the decision that bilateral negotiations wouldn't work, and the reason I made that decision is because they didn't."

Three weeks later, chief U.S. negotiator Christopher Hill secretly met alone with his North Korean counterpart in China. Three months after that, they met again in Berlin. Eight months later Israel bombed a Syrian nuclear facility that had been constructed with North Korean assistance.

Despite all of this—despite North Korean nuclear aid to one of the world's leading terrorist regimes and despite its subsequent failure to account for its nuclear programs—in June the Bush administration volunteered to lift sanctions on North Korea under the Trading with the Enemy Act and, over the objection of our close ally Japan, decided to remove North Korea from the State Department's list of State Sponsors of Terror.

It has been a dispiriting few weeks. Several conservative political appointees have said that they are embarrassed to be working in the Bush administration. One called the new policies "preemptive capitulation." Another suggested that whatever credit the Bush administration deserved for keeping Americans safe in the seven years after 9/11 would be offset by the blame the administration will have earned

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for emboldening America's enemies with its reflexive weakness. And a former adviser to Condoleezza Rice said: "This is stunningly shameful."

But, our diplomats were not finished. In his appearance on Capitol Hill, Burns was asked about reports that the United States is considering opening a U.S. interests section in Tehran. He declined to talk about internal State Department deliberations but reported that such a move—one that would bring the United States one step closer to the "more normal relationship" Condoleezza Rice promised back in January without any indication that Iran intends to stop or even slow its pursuit of nuclear weapons—is under active consideration.

The Iranians have certainly been paying attention to this kinder, gentler Bush administration and its sudden embrace of the thank-you-sir-may-I-have-another school of diplomacy.

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei understands that aggressive rhetoric is effective. "The positions of the Islamic Republic and the red lines of the Iranian nation are very clear and if the parties of negotiation negotiate within this framework, the authorities will engage in dialogue. But the condition is that no one threatens the Iranian nation," he said last week, according to a translation published on *NationalReviewOnline*. "The Iranian nation will cut the hand which is raised against the dear Islamic Republic. . . . There are those who say that the American president would do something in his final months of presidency. . . . [T]he Iranian nation will punish him, even if he is out of office and no longer has any official responsibility."

Two weeks before the Bush administration announced it would be crossing the final red line in diplomacy with Iran, and sending a senior U.S. official for direct meetings with a terrorist-friendly regime, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad predicted that the United States would acquiesce. "They know that they cannot use the language of force against Iran," he said, "and must bend in the face of the will of the Iranian people."

And bend they did.

—Stephen F. Hayes, for the Editors

Over to You, Speaker Pelosi

Gas is still at $4 a gallon, but the good news is there's an emerging consensus on a measure that would help: Drill for more oil here at home. President Bush dropped the executive ban on offshore oil and natural gas exploration last week, and House GOP leader John Boehner plans to lead a congressional delegation to Colorado and Alaska to highlight America's abundant energy resources this week. Polls show more than two-thirds of the public support increased domestic energy exploration and production. Guess who stands in the way.

Congress has its own ban on offshore energy exploration, and the Democrats who run Congress have shown no sign that they are willing to follow Bush's example. They have preferred to make excuses—about why the price of oil is rising, who is to blame for its rise, and why increasing domestic supply won't do anything to ameliorate the problem.

It isn't working. Democrats are losing the fight over gas prices, and they know it, too.

They have slowly changed positions as the absurdity of their arguments has become clear. First they ignored the problem altogether. Earlier this summer, Senate Democrats wasted time debating a carbon cap-and-trade scheme that would have raised energy prices dramatically at a time when those prices were already at record highs. Cap and trade crashed and burned.

For a long while, Democrats simply blamed the oil companies for the spike in gasoline prices. They proposed new windfall profits taxes on "Big Oil," which would of course be passed on to the consumer, making gasoline even more expensive. They even threatened to sue OPEC. Nonstarters all. The price of oil didn't drop.

Then the Democrats—and, to their discredit, plenty of Republicans—decided to scapegoat "speculators." The thinking here is that commodities traders have a financial interest in watching prices go up. Well, some do. Others—those betting prices will fall—do not. The fact that there are traders of oil futures has nothing to do with *why* those prices increase. The "speculators" just make bets on where the price of a commodity will be by a certain date. This year, the bets on higher oil prices have been good because the falling dollar, rising global demand, and political instability in the Middle East and Africa are driving the price of this particular commodity upward.

When ignorance and finger-pointing didn't work, Democrats dusted off the law of supply and demand. But they refused to acknowledge that one of the best ways to increase supply is to expand America's production capacity by opening new territory to exploration. Rather, they demanded that Bush release oil from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, forgetting that the reserve is called "strategic" for a reason. It's meant to be used in a national emergency. Bush has stopped new shipments to the reserve, increasing supply on the (microscopic) margins.

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Meanwhile, New York senator Charles Schumer demanded that other oil-producing nations increase production in order to lower U.S. gas prices. If only the Saudis "produced half a million barrels more oil a day," Schumer said, "the price would come down a very significant amount." Maybe so. But why rely on the Saudis? Why not take steps to increase our own supply? Are we dependents?

The Democrats' next tack was to suggest that the oil companies are sitting on millions of acres of oil and not doing anything about it. Last week House Democrats tried to pass a "use it or lose it" law that would have denied federal land leases to oil companies if the companies couldn't demonstrate that they were producing energy on existing plots. The bill was rejected, and for good reasons. For one, there is already a "use it or lose it" provision in federal law. For another, the bill was premised on the idea that 4.8 million barrels of oil a day could be extracted from these "unused" lands. Boehner has asked Speaker Pelosi where this unsubstantiated statistic comes from. She hasn't said. That is because the number is a joke.

Finally, Democrats are attacking the pro-drilling folks for thinking ahead. Exploring deposits on the continental shelf "wouldn't produce a drop of oil for seven years or longer," wrote Senator Dianne Feinstein. Nobel laureate Al Gore said last week, "It is only a truly dysfunctional system that would buy into the perverse logic that the short-term answer to high gasoline prices is drilling for more oil ten years from now."

Leave aside, for a moment, the fact that no one is saying drilling is a short-term answer to the long-term energy challenge. Recall, instead, that Feinstein and Gore are simply echoing what critics say every time the drilling issue arises. Whether it is twenty or ten years ago or today, the answer is always, "You won't see anything for ten years." Okay, then. But if we had drilled ten years ago, wouldn't those supplies be on the market today?

No one pretends that drilling will solve all our problems overnight. But it will send a powerful signal to the markets that America is serious about energy and the global economy. It will send a signal that we are taking action, that we are not helpless. The 25-year boom of the 1980s and 1990s coincided with, and to an extent depended on, an era of cheap and plentiful energy. To get there again requires favoring the national interest over the parochial interests of environmentalists. No excuses. It's time to drill.

—Matthew Continetti, for the Editors

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We Can't Handle the Truth

The surest way to create a campaign controversy.

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

JASON SEILER

Former Texas senator Phil Gramm ran for president in 1996. He raised $20 million, spent nearly all of it, and won zero delegates. Political observers had long thought such a feat was impossible, and it remains astonishing even in hindsight. Recently we were reminded how he managed to pull it off.

Earlier this month, Gramm gave an interview to the *Washington Times* in which he asserted that the U.S. economy wasn't in a recession. We are, however, in a "mental recession," he said—a loss of consumer confidence, stoked by hysterical media reports, that threatens to tip the economy into a real recession.

This is all true. You could look it up: A recession is two consecutive quarters of economic contraction, and the economy didn't contract last quarter. But Gramm was pilloried for his factual statement. Before his interview with the *Times*, it was assumed (by professional assumers) that Gramm would be offered a high-ranking economic-policymaking job in a McCain administration, maybe even secretary of the Treasury; now assumers are assuming he'll never get such a cool job—especially after he made matters worse by insisting a day later that the fact he had asserted was, in fact, a fact: "Every word I said was true."

To which the general reaction was: So what? Gramm's candidate John McCain said that he "didn't agree" with the fact that Gramm had cited. Clambering down from the high ground of the factual and the objective, McCain slipped himself into the slough of the subjective and the romantic, where politicians and voters now prefer to luxuriate. "I believe that the

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person here in [the absolutely crucial swing state of] Michigan who just lost his job isn't suffering from a mental recession," McCain said empathically. Most of the media reports offered an even bolder response to Gramm. Okay, said David Wright, the reporter who covered the story for ABC, maybe the "economic fundamentals are sound," as Gramm asserted. "But that's no consolation to folks who worry about their mortgages and are paying these high prices at the pump."

In other words: What Gramm said was true, but it didn't matter. He wins on the merits—he said the economy wasn't in a recession, and it wasn't—but he deserves a reprimand anyway. He had stumbled into a zone of politics where you're not supposed to say something true, and where you get punished if you do.

Have you noticed how big this zone is getting? The political landscape is littered with people who have been castigated, fired, or forced to apologize for the gross infraction of saying something true. Last December the co-chairman of Hillary Clinton's New Hampshire campaign, Bill Shaheen, suggested that Barack Obama's admitted use of drugs as a young man might somehow—just maybe—be cited to Obama's detriment by Republicans in the presidential campaign. He was asked to resign for committing the truth offense, and not a peep, true or false, has been heard from him since.

Charlie Black, an adviser to John McCain, was luckier. He's still emitting peeps, even though he made an abstract point about the campaign as unforgivably true as Shaheen's.

Black's transgression came in an interview with *Fortune* magazine, when he was asked about the political consequences of another terrorist attack on U.S. soil. The question itself was kind of tasteless, but Black answered anyway.

"Certainly it would be a big advantage to him," Black said. Most news outlets reported the comment as news, even though it's hard to imagine that any newsroom in the country employs a single reporter who doesn't know that Black's point was true. Yet when reporters informed McCain of Black's assertion, McCain disavowed it: "I strenuously disagree," he said.

McCain almost certainly knows that Black's statement was correct, of course. But McCain also knows how the life cycle of political controversy works: The surest way to quiet a controversy created by saying something true is to say something untrue. Then the general air of insincerity is restored, and we can all calm down.

This was the effect of Obama's repudiation of his supporter Wesley Clark, the former general and a onetime presidential candidate of Gramm-like ineptitude. In a television interview a few weeks ago, Clark called McCain "a hero to me" and then said this: "I don't think riding in a fighter plane and getting shot down is a qualification to be president." It's hard to disagree with that—which is why no one does, not really. Is there anyone who thinks that every Vietnam-era POW fighter pilot is qualified to be president? How about the ones who didn't get shot down? How about the ones who got shot down but didn't become POWs? Where does the presidential qualification lie—in getting shot down, in getting captured, or in just being a fighter pilot?

People were too mad at Clark to take the time to ask such questions. The reaction was so hostile and immediate that Obama repudiated his supporter the next day. In a speech, Obama chose to rephrase Clark's statement into a statement Clark hadn't made, and then to disavow it boldly, courageously, forthrightly. "No one," said Obama, eyes flashing, "should ever devalue [McCain's] service, especially for the sake of a political campaign."

Clark hadn't devalued McCain's service, of course. He'd just spoken a truth—a truism, almost. For Obama, however, the repudiation of Clark was a two-fer: Not only did he misrepresent what Clark had said—thus pushing the political conversation back toward its usual falseness and misdirection—but he also got to look bipartisan. In this era of raging, vicious partisanship, Americans crave bipartisan misrepresentation.

Nobody, I'll bet, understands this better than Geraldine Ferraro, the 1984 vice presidential candidate who committed the year's most spectacular example of the truth offense. Ferraro beats out several competitors. These include Austan Goolsbee, an economic adviser to Obama who was criticized for uttering the truth that his candidate will moderate his opposition to free trade once he's in the White House, just as, historically, all anti-free trade presidential candidates have done. Ferraro tops even Samantha Power, the Obama adviser who made the unmentionably true assertion that Obama, if elected, would "revisit" his campaign pledge to withdraw troops from Iraq in 16 months.

True, true, all offensively true: but not as unmentionable as the truths that Geraldine Ferraro let slip. "In 1984," Ferraro said a few months ago, "if my name was Gerard Ferraro instead of Geraldine Ferraro, I would not have been chosen as a vice presidential candidate." True! In the same way, Ferraro said, referring to Obama's amazing rise in presidential politics, "If Obama were a white man, he would not be in this position." Double true! Obama called her statement "absurd" and an example of "slice and dice politics"—a charge that would have stung if anyone had known what "slice and dice politics" meant.

Ferraro flailed away in protest at the resulting controversy, growing so desperate that she even agreed to appear with Bill O'Reilly. But she was doomed, and she probably knew it. One voice was raised in defense of her truth telling, though: that of Bob Johnson, founder of Black Entertainment Television. He's black too.

"Geraldine Ferraro said it right," said Johnson: Obama wouldn't be leading the presidential race if he were a white politician from Illinois with four years' experience in the U.S. Senate.

Then Johnson lamented the quality of talk in the presidential campaign. "It's almost impossible for anybody to say anything."

Listen to this man! He speaks the truth. So you may not hear from him again till the campaign is over. ♦

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From Newsroom to White House

Tony Snow, 1955-2008.

BY TERRY EASTLAND

Tony Snow was two years out of college when he got his first job in journalism. I was editor of the editorial page of the *Greensboro Record*, the afternoon daily in Greensboro, N.C., and I needed an editorial writer. Tony applied for the job. He had no "clips" as such, but the several pieces of writing he submitted showed he could compose a decent sentence. That, together with the fact that his references spoke highly of his character, persuaded me to hire him. Even so, I had no idea whether he could write on deadline, though he was confident he could. Nor was it clear where he would fall politically. I sensed that during his time at Davidson College he had been attracted to some left-wing causes but that now he was taking a fresh look at the world.

Tony's interests turned out to be more literary and philosophical than political. Public policy often bored him. But he figured out how to write editorials, and on deadline, and his pieces fit well enough into our conservative page. He learned to lay out pages, and he wrote a few reviews for the morning paper, the *Greensboro Daily News* (which eventually absorbed the *Record*). One summer I sent Tony to the newsroom so he could have the experience of actually reporting stories. He was learning the business, as they say, and in 1981, when I went to Norfolk to edit the editorial page of our parent company's flagship paper, the *Virginian-Pilot*, I hired Tony a second time.

I think it was while he was in Norfolk that Tony, who had considered other lines of work, decided to stick with newspapers. He became a student of politics and wrote editorials informed by solid reporting. And he was a reliable deputy. Inevitably, another paper—the one across the bay in Newport News—asked him to be its editorial page editor. The *Detroit News* hired him next, and then, in 1987, the *Washington Times* made him its editorial page editor, his fifth newspaper job in eight years.

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Tony didn't fear his cancer. He said that it drew him closer to God and for that reason was a blessing. And while he knew that it could kill him, he refused to see death as the end of the story.

While at the *Times*, Tony began doing radio and television. His visibility as a conservative was such that he came to the attention of the first Bush White House and eventually was hired as chief speechwriter. When he went back to journalism, Tony wrote a syndicated column and did a lot of television and radio, along with as many speeches as he could. He developed one of those multimedia careers that seem to thrive in the nation's capital.

It was in the early '90s that Rush Limbaugh began using Tony when he needed a substitute. I think that was a turning point in his career. Exposed to Limbaugh's huge, nationwide audience, Tony gained his own following. In political terms, he acquired a base. When Fox News Channel was launched in 1996, it needed to attract an audience and asked Tony to anchor its Sunday morning talk show. He was the obvious choice.

In 2003 Fox moved Tony out of that job. The rap was that he didn't press hard enough in interviews. Fox gave him less compelling assignments but also a radio show. Tony had thought for some time that he'd eventually have his own show, but he never expected to get it this way. It was a setback, but he didn't complain about it. Here, as throughout his career, he had confidence that something better would open up for him. And so it did in 2006 when he became White House press secretary.

Tony loved the job. It was his greatest achievement, as jobs go. And, learning from some early bumps in the road, he was very good at it. Indeed, he redefined the position, drawing on his experiences in both old and new media to serve the White House press corps and President Bush. He had credibility with the press, and he could intelligently argue the administration's case. It's too bad Bush didn't think to hire Tony in 2001.

Tony broke with what might be called White House press secretarial precedent by being the featured speaker at GOP fundraisers. He had that kind of star power. He might well have become a politician. You could

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easily imagine him running for high office. But, as he knew, that would have been a merely earthly ambition.

When I first met Tony, he was not an unbeliever, but he was not exactly a churchman, either. In the '90s, when his career was taking off, his interest in ultimate things intensified. He told me several times about the books he was reading, which included titles by C.S. Lewis. His Christian faith began to deepen.

Looking back, you could say he was being prepared to deal with the colon cancer that was discovered in 2005 and took his life the week before last. His mother had died of the same disease when he was 17. Tony told Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post* that the ghost of colon cancer had stalked him from the time she died until the time he got it.

But he didn't fear his cancer. He said that it drew him closer to God and for that reason was a blessing. And while he knew that his cancer could kill him, he refused to see death as the end of the story.

"God doesn't promise us tomorrow," he wrote last year in *Christianity Today*, "but he does promise us eternity—filled with life and love we cannot comprehend."

Such optimism is grounded in the bedrock teaching of Christianity, which is that the crucified, dead, and buried Christ by his resurrection has destroyed "the last enemy," which is death itself.

It's still hard for me to believe that the young man I first met in Greensboro almost 30 years ago is no longer with us. His career in journalism and government occurred during an era when conservatives either held or significantly influenced the exercise of power, and when the old media establishments, often purveyors of liberal news, found their ability to set the nation's agenda weakened, thanks to the emergence of new media, including talk radio and cable television news and, of course, the web. If Tony was a man well suited to his time, however, he did not regard this life as all there is. For by his faith he understood that there is more to come. ♦

Obama, Democrats, and the Surge

They were against it before it succeeded.

BY PETER WEHNER

This was the week that the Democratic party ran up the white flag when it comes to the surge in Iraq. Leading the surrender was none other than Barack Obama, the Democratic party's presumptive nominee for president and among the most vocal critics of the counterinsurgency plan that has transformed the Iraq war from a potentially catastrophic loss to what may turn out to be a historically significant victory.

Last Monday, July 14, Obama wrote a *New York Times* op-ed in which he acknowledged the success of the surge. "In the 18 months since President Bush announced the surge," Obama wrote, "our troops have performed heroically in bringing down the level of violence. New tactics have protected the Iraqi population, and the Sunni tribes have rejected Al Qaeda—greatly weakening its effectiveness." A day later, Obama gave a speech in which he declared for the first time that "true success" and "victory in Iraq" were possible. In addition, the Obama campaign scrubbed its presidential website to remove criticism of the surge.

The debate, then, is over, and the (landslide) verdict is in: The surge has been a tremendous success.

Obama, in typical fashion, is trying to use the success of the surge he opposed to justify his long-held commitment to withdraw all combat troops from Iraq as quickly as possible. But turning Iraq into a winning political issue won't be nearly as easy as Obama once thought. He has stepped into a trap of his own making.

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The trap was set when Obama repeatedly insisted that his superior "judgment" on Iraq is more important than experience in national security affairs. Judgment, according to Obama, is what qualifies him to be commander in chief. So what can we discern about Obama's judgment on the surge, easily the most important national security decision since the Iraq war began in March 2003?

To answer that question, we need to revisit what Obama said about the surge around the time it was announced. In October 2006—three months before the president's new strategy was unveiled—Obama said, "It is clear at this point that we cannot, through putting in more troops or maintaining the presence that we have, expect that somehow the situation is going to improve, and we have to do something significant to break the pattern that we've been in right now."

On January 10, 2007, the night the surge was announced, Obama declared, "I am not persuaded that 20,000 additional troops in Iraq are going to solve the sectarian violence there. In fact, I think it will do the reverse." A week later, he insisted the surge strategy would "not prove to be one that changes the dynamics significantly." And in reaction to the president's January 23 State of the Union address, Obama said,

> I don't think the president's strategy is going to work. We went through two weeks of hearings on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; experts from across the spectrum—military and civilian, conservative and liberal—expressed great skepticism about it. My suggestion to the president has been that the only way we're going to

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> change the dynamic in Iraq and start seeing political commendation is actually if we create a system of phased redeployment. And, frankly, the president, I think, has not been willing to consider that option, not because it's not militarily sound but because he continues to cling to the belief that somehow military solutions are going to lead to victory in Iraq.

In July, after evidence was amassing that the surge was working, Obama said, "My assessment is that the surge has not worked."

Obama, then, was not only wrong about the surge; he was spectacularly wrong. And he continued to remain wrong even as mounting evidence of its success gave way to overwhelming evidence of its success.

But Obama is not alone. Virtually the entire Democratic party, including every Democrat running for president, opposed the surge. For example, Senator Joseph Biden—considered by some pundits a foreign policy sage—declared, a few days before the surge was announced, "If he surges another 20, 30 [thousand], or whatever number he's going to, into Baghdad, it'll be a tragic mistake."

Hillary Clinton, on the night the surge was announced, said, "Based on the president's speech tonight, I cannot support his proposed escalation of the war in Iraq."

Senator John Kerry said this in February 2007: "The simple fact is that sending in over 20,000 additional troops isn't the answer—in fact, it's a tragic mistake. It won't end the violence; it won't provide security; . . . it won't turn back the clock and avoid the civil war that is already underway; it won't deter terrorists, who have a completely different agenda; it won't rein in the militias."

Kerry's fellow Massachusetts senator, Ted Kennedy, declared that any troop increase would be "an immense new mistake."

Representative Dennis Kucinich, in this instance speaking for the mainstream of his party, put it this way: "It has been proven time and time again that troop surges don't work."

In April 2007, Senate majority leader Harry Reid declared the Iraq war "lost" and insisted, "This surge is not accomplishing anything."

Also in April, Senator Christopher Dodd said, "We don't need a surge of troops in Iraq—we need a surge of diplomacy and politics. Every knowledgeable person who has examined the Iraq situation for the past several years—Baker and Hamilton, senior military officials, junior officers—has drawn the same conclusion—there is no military solution in Iraq. To insist upon a surge is wrong."

In September 2007, Senator Dick Durbin, the Democratic majority whip, in anticipation of congressional testimony by General Petraeus, said, "By carefully manipulating the statistics, the Bush-Petraeus report will try to persuade us that violence in Iraq is decreasing and thus the surge is work-

MICHAEL RAMIREZ

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ing. Even if the figures were right, the conclusion is wrong."

A month later Representative David Obey, asked if the surge strategy was working, offered the view that if violence is decreasing in Iraq, it may be because insurgents "are running out of people to kill."

In February of this year, Speaker Nancy Pelosi was asked by CNN's Wolf Blitzer about the success of the surge in Iraq. "Are you not worried, though, that all the gains that have been achieved over the past year might be lost?" Blitzer asked.

"There haven't been gains, Wolf," Pelosi replied. "The gains have not produced the desired effect, which is the reconciliation of Iraq. This is a failure. This is a failure."

And as recently as last month, Governor Bill Richardson, when asked if he was ready to concede that John McCain had been right in proposing the surge because it seemed to be having a positive impact, answered, "Absolutely not."

Democrats, then, have compounded their initial bad judgment about the surge with reckless obstinacy. As ethno-sectarian violence in Iraq rapidly declined, as al Qaeda absorbed tremendous military blows, and as political accommodation and legislative achievements have emerged, Democrats, rather than welcoming the progress, grew agitated. They embraced with religious zeal the belief that the Iraq war was lost; they therefore viewed the success of the surge as a terribly inconvenient development, one they sought to deny to the point that they looked silly and out of touch. Worse, Democrats acted as if they had a vested interest in an American defeat.

Rarely has a political party been so uniformly wrong, in such an obvious way, on such an important matter. And when Americans cast their vote on November 4, they should carefully consider how Barack Obama and the entire Democratic party fought ferociously and relentlessly to undermine a policy that has worked extraordinarily well and may yet prove to be among the most successful military plans in modern times. ♦

Into Africa

Mischief-making is the latest Chinese export.

BY ROGER KAPLAN

Close on the heels of the latest sham election in Zimbabwe, the International Criminal Court announced last week that it is seeking the arrest of the president of Sudan on charges of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. As Africa notches up more failures on the long road out of colonialism, a new pseudo-colonial power—China—is busily engaged in getting exactly what it wants out of the continent. The implications for the kind of political and economic evolution likely to unfold in Africa are significant.

> China's military role on the continent has grown in importance. Equipment and advisers have been sent to Congo (Kinshasa) and Angola, and there were reports in 2003 that firms fronting for the People's Liberation Army were smuggling weapons to Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Until about 20 years ago, China's interest in Africa consisted mainly of encouraging Marxist revolutionary factions. Lately, however, that interest has taken a decidedly economic turn. China is in the market for most of Africa's products and is selling its own there as well. Once a major oil exporter, China became a net importer of oil in 1993 and is now dependent on imports for half its oil and natural gas. To meet this need, it has diversified its sources, in particular making deals with most of Africa's oil-producing states.

Just in the past three years, Beijing has signed energy deals with Algeria, Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, and Sudan. Its investment in Sudan's pipeline and refinery infrastructure, valued at between $3 billion and $5 billion, is mind-boggling in such a poor country, but it is not unusual for the energy industry. China bought a stake in a Nigerian offshore field two years ago for $2.5 billion and promised to invest the same amount in further exploration and development. China has huge investments in Algeria, with whose government it is also cooperating on the development of nuclear energy, and Angola, which this spring overtook Nigeria as the continent's largest producer of oil.

Chinese investment in Africa took off exponentially in the early 1990s. So did China-Africa trade. According to the Nigerian economist Adama Gaye, trade between China and Africa reached the $10 billion mark in 2000 and is likely to reach $55 billion this year. If it reaches $100 billion in 2010, as Gaye thinks likely, it will surpass both American and French trade with Africa. The continent's other major trading partners are India (growing) and Britain (not growing).

Significantly, Nigeria's then-president Olusegun Obasanjo, once a U.S. favorite, said last year that this would be the Chinese century, and he encouraged Africans to stay with the leader. There is no question China's mix of authoritarianism and rapid economic development is tempting to states whose political and economic institutions are fragile and whose relations with the liberal West tend to be ambivalent.

Not that the United States has been absent from African affairs. On

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Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe (left) meets with China's Hu Jintao at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, November 6, 2006.

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the contrary, the Bush administration has supported huge increases in African exports to the United States (through the tariff-ending Africa Growth Opportunity Act) and U.S. investments in Africa (through the State Department's Overseas Private Investment Corporation), as well as debt relief initiatives, development aid in agriculture, and programs to combat disease and keep children in school. The Bush administration has encouraged African development more seriously than any of its predecessors, and it has insisted that prosperity is more likely to endure if accompanied by the spread of the institutions that sustain free societies, rather than the authoritarian model China promotes.

Which will be the ascendant influence? Chinese consumer goods are becoming ubiquitous in Africa, as elsewhere. "Made in China" clothes, personal and commercial vehicles, and electronics are widely available, and Chinese fast-food is even catching on. High level trade and investment delegations on multi-country tours are almost banal, while the annual "China-Africa Forums" are becoming more important in terms of deal-making than the *Francophonie* summits that France sponsors. Chinese assistance includes the deployment of thousands of doctors to fight tropical and infectious diseases.

The Chinese contribute hospitals, schools, and roads—they are building the trans-Maghreb highway across Algeria, for example, on which travelers ride in Chinese-assembled buses. Although as recently as a few years back Peugeot was the dominant car in West Africa by far, Japan's Toyota and Korea's Hyundai, both assembled in China, and China's own Chery Automobile will soon overtake it.

Prestige follows power. "Confucian Centers" are promoting Chinese language study in 16 countries, while "Confucian Institutes" in partnership with local universities have been established for advanced study of language and management in Sudan, Zimbabwe, Kenya, and South Africa. Scholarships are offered for university study in China. Chinese radio broadcasts in several languages compete with the popular programs of the Voice of America, the BBC, and RFI.

China's military role on the continent has grown in importance. Equipment and advisers have been sent to Congo (Kinshasa) and Angola, and there were reports in 2003 that firms fronting for the People's Liberation Army were smuggling weapons to Sierra Leone and Liberia during those small West African countries' catastrophic diamond wars, into which Ivory Coast, beset by its own north-south sectional and tribal problems, was drawn.

China's diplomatic support for the regime in Khartoum is well known as a result of Western efforts to broker peace among the many contending Sudanese clans and tribes. Lately Beijing, concerned to avoid criticism of its embrace of brutal regimes in the run-up to the Olympic Games, has pressured Sudan to cooperate with the deployment of a U.N.-African Union force to protect people in the war-torn

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The 1996 China-Africa Forum, Beijing

Darfur province from tribal militias, some of which Khartoum has armed and supported.

It is worth keeping in mind, however, that civil wars have raged in Sudan practically without interruption since independence in 1956, and China, building its influence in the country, made no effort to stop them. Beijing's official position has been that the "situation in Sudan is an internal affair," as one Chinese foreign minister said. Although wars between the Arab north and the black south officially ended in 2005, the government of Omar al-Bashir is showing little inclination to respect the share-the-oil part of the U.S.-brokered peace agreement. Khartoum has spent some of its revenue from oil on Chinese arms, reinforced by Chinese military personnel.

Meanwhile, the violence in Darfur, which began with the revolt of Muslim tribes in the western province and led to brutal counterinsurgency campaigns, recently blew back into Khartoum. One of the many Darfuri armed groups sent a motorized column into Sudan's capital, where it was decimated—quite possibly with direct Chinese help. J. Peter Pham, a professor at James Madison University and a fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies who reported last year on the Chinese military association with Sudan, notes that when you provide a regime with $100 million worth of supersonic fighter jets, you must really intend for that regime to survive.

Darfur crisis watchers and activists are well aware that the people they are trying to protect in that disaster zone (a quarter of a million killed, two million displaced) are attacked from the air as well as on the ground. Meanwhile, a congressionally mandated report dated October 2006 had already put at anywhere from 4,000 to 10,000 the number of Chinese soldiers in Sudan, lightly disguised as petroleum engineers and construction workers.

Sudan's complexities, however, are unlikely to becloud China's keen sense of its own interests. In the Horn of Africa, for example, Pham points out China has sold a billion dollars' worth of arms to both sides in one of the continent's many underreported conflicts, the one between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Beijing bet heavily on Sudan's Omar al-Bashir, but if or when the southerners go back to the hills to fight for their independence (and their oil), it may well be with arms supplied by China. Until then, Bashir's indictment by the International Criminal Court can only strengthen the Chinese hand to the degree it increases the president's diplomatic isolation.

Arms, too—specifically a shipment of three million AK-47 rounds, rocket-propelled grenades, and mortars—are at the center of the latest episode in the long and warm relationship between China and Zimbabwe. The shipment, on the *An Yue Jiang* last April, was by no means unusual, but dockworkers in Durban, South Africa, refused to unload it for the overland part of its journey.

The good relations between South Africa and Zimbabwe have been strained by the crazy rule of Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party, which has wrecked a once-flourishing economy, murdered opposition activists, shut down a vigorous independent press, and now is forcing tens of thousands of refugees across the border into Botswana and South Africa, leading to deadly riots. Under these conditions, sending arms right in the middle of a presidential election that the ruling clique was determined to brazen out (Mugabe openly stated he would not allow the opposition Movement for Democratic Change to come to power) strained even the old-comrade ties that have made South African president Thabo Mbeki reluctant to criticize Mugabe.

It is of course quite possible that the days of strongmen like Mugabe are numbered anyway. In the meantime, however, the *An Yue Jiang*'s cargo reportedly arrived safe and sound in Harare, having transited through Mozambique. Will Chinese president Hu Jintao give some stern advice to Mugabe, as he did in June to the Sudanese vice president?

During violence in Kenya last winter sparked by flawed elections, China's *People's Daily* (the organ of the ruling party) editorialized that "Western-style democracy is not suited for Africa." However, passing through Washington last month, Kenya's prime minister, Raila Odinga, sharply criticized Mugabe and called free elections imperative in Zimbabwe.

If an American presidential candidate did the same—if, without injecting himself into Zimbabwe's or Sudan's or any other country's internal politics, Barack Obama or John McCain made it clear the United States dislikes the kinds of political regimes China promotes and enables—Africans would surely take note. Indeed, in a campaign year unlike any previous one, Americans themselves might notice. ♦

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The Future of Iraq

The decline of violence, the rise of politics

By Kimberly Kagan

Baghdad

I have made four trips to Iraq since May 2007. I have walked through markets in Baghdad escorted by U.S. soldiers, visited the outposts where they live with their Iraqi army partners, talked with school children playing soccer in the street, seen newly renovated housing in war-torn neighborhoods, and eaten in the homes of local and tribal leaders who have helped our soldiers fight Al Qaeda in Iraq. This morning, a weekday in July 2008, I am doing something I have never done before: visiting the headquarters of a small Iraqi political party to learn about its campaign for the upcoming provincial and national elections.

The visit was not on the original itinerary of the group of military analysts with whom I am traveling. The party's leader, a member of parliament whom we met several days ago, invited us to his headquarters, our schedule permitting. We have cancelled a morning's worth of meetings in order to see something new.

And so I step out of a Humvee onto a quiet, semi-residential street in central Baghdad, lined with trees that shade us from the bright sun. The only U.S. military personnel in sight are our escorts. We Americans are incongruously dressed in the body armor and helmets required outside the Green Zone, while our host, who comes out to greet us, is wearing a fine suit. We look as ridiculous in our protective gear as we would if we dressed like this to walk into a foreign embassy just off 16th Street in Washington.

Iraqis at Al-Zawra amusement park, Baghdad, July 2008

GETTY IMAGES

The member of parliament—whom I choose not to name; he survived an assassination attempt years ago that killed members of his family—escorts us into the building. His party is secular and nonsectarian. There were 70 founding members at its first meeting, he says, before the 2005 elections. Today the party has over 10,000 members and headquarters in most of Iraq's major cities. Our friend holds his party's single seat in the Council of Representatives, a body of 275 legislators, in which the dominant forces are Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Dawa party, Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim's Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), and the Sadrist Trend.

Our host gives us a brief tour of the headquarters. It is strikingly familiar, reminiscent of hundreds of town and county election headquarters in the United States. A wide-screen television in the large conference room displays news continuously. A freshly photocopied stack of flyers sits in an anteroom, explaining the party's position on the strategic agreement between Iraq and the United States that is the subject of intense debate throughout the country. Party officials responsible for different districts of Baghdad plan to distribute the flyers door to door over the weekend, assisted by staff and volunteers. They are preparing another round of flyers for next week. Nearby, young men and women sit at a bank of computers writing and designing the party's newspaper and laying out the advertisements that pay for its production. The color photographs in today's edition highlight a recent event sponsored by the party's youth committee: an awards ceremony for school children who have gotten top grades this academic year.

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Over the past year, the struggle for power in Iraq has shifted from military conflict to political competition. Iraq's leaders—Sunni, Shia, Turkmen, and Kurd—are thinking ever less about how to use armed might and ever more about winning votes.

Our tour of the various sections, from the youth committee to the women's committee, lasts ten minutes. Then our host whispers that it's time for chai. We sit down to drink tea in the party's formal conference room, perched on the gold-hued couches that Iraqi officials think are elegant. Extra chairs are brought in from all over the building in order to seat the 30 party members who have come to discuss politics with us. Roughly half of them are in their twenties, like the bright and earnest recent college graduates one finds working for any U.S. election campaign. The young men are awkwardly dressed in suits; a few of them, daringly, do not wear the customary moustache—a bold statement of their post-Saddam outlook.

I am one of seven women in the room, which is a record number for me in Iraq, whether with Iraqis or with U.S. forces. The older women, well dressed in suits and headscarves, are senior officials in the party. The young women's outfits vary, and show a range of interpretations of traditional Muslim dress. Most wear headscarves. One beautiful young woman has covered her hair with a chic, regal, purple scarf glinting with beads, coordinated perfectly with her colorful, tailored long skirt. The headscarf brings out her perfectly made-up eyes. Her image is modern and elegant, whereas her equally modern companion dresses more casually—a pair of jeans, a blouse, and a translucent pink headscarf. Another twenty-something, in a lace-trimmed blouse and long skirt, shakes her uncovered hair, which is long and highlighted.

We sip our tea and discuss the upcoming provincial elections. The party leader proudly takes out a folder containing the results of last week's poll, which the party commissioned from an independent firm. He has very high name recognition, strong favorable ratings, and low unfavorable ratings. If these continue until Iraq's national elections in 2009, he thinks he will retain his seat in parliament, and the party may gain a few more.

We are guests, so we ask our questions first. We discuss the party and its campaign, national issues such as foreign investment in Iraq, and foreign affairs including the Iranian nuclear program. We ask what they tell people when they go door to door: Why should anyone join and vote for their party? One older woman answers, We are religious people, but we are not a religious party. Any Iraqi can join, regardless of sect. We stand for all Iraqis. She says this gravely, and it does not seem a platitude.

These party members are hardly naive, despite their optimism. They have experienced politically driven and sectarian violence. The headquarters is surrounded by low, concrete barriers to protect it from vehicle bombs. After the party signed a lease for its first headquarters in Baghdad in 2005, the homeowner reneged on the agreement for fear that his property would be bombed, so the party moved.

I ask the young people why they have joined the party, and whether they hope to have careers in politics. One young man, who has been to college, explains that many young Iraqis have not had a proper education. He has joined the party and its youth committee to help improve Iraqi education, recruit good teachers, and ensure that all young people can not only read and write, but also acquire the skills that they will need to pursue their careers in a high-tech world. This is important, he insists, not only for the young people themselves, but also for the future of Iraq's economy, which must be able to compete in the global market. Another young man will not pursue a career exclusively in politics, but believes that when he enters the business world his political connections will come in handy.

The young woman with highlighted hair is frankly ambitious. She intends to have a political career and hopes to be a high party official someday—so she can better help the people, she adds as an afterthought. The older woman seated next to the party leader smiles wryly at this comment and cleans her spectacles so no one will notice her expression. She is evidently the high official that the young woman aspires to replace.

This could be the future of Iraq. These people have a strong vision of what their country can become, and are working to bring it to fruition in their lifetimes. They are not alone. In fact, 502 political parties have registered to participate in the provincial elections that officials anticipate will be held

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Assault rifles seized by Iraqi security forces in Sadr City, displayed at a press event at the 9th Iraqi Army Division headquarters in Baghdad.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES

in December. Iraq's electoral commission, which determines whether parties are legitimate, rejected only 17 applications.

Five hundred parties are a lot. Forty registered in Basra alone, and if each runs a full slate of candidates (provincial councils have around 30 members), the ballot will look like a phone book. The proliferation of parties is not entirely desirable. Were they to join together in legislative and electoral coalitions, they might compete more directly with the larger parties. Iraqi politics tends to be noisy, chaotic, and unpredictable.

But the key point is, it is politics. Over the past year, the struggle for power in Iraq has shifted from military conflict to political competition. Iraq's leaders—Sunni, Shia, Turkmen, and Kurd—are thinking ever less about how to use armed might to seize or retain control of all or part of the country and ever more about winning votes. For all its drawbacks, the proliferation of political parties is an enormous advance toward stable, nonsectarian, or at least cross-sectarian politics.

Until now, Iraqi politics has been dominated by clerical parties attempting to function as monolithic blocs. An alliance between the ISCI and Maliki's Dawa party dominated Shia politics, challenged only by the Sadrist Trend. The Iraq Islamic party (IIP) represented Iraq's Sunni Arabs. The two Kurdish parties functioned largely as a bloc. The resulting parliamentary politics was simple, because there were really only three moving parts. It was also dysfunctional, because the Arab parties reflected the most hardline sectarian views of a minority of their constituents much more than the moderate views of the majority. The breaking of this sectarian political logjam would be an epochal event in Iraq, and it appears to be well underway.

The prime minister's decision to clear Basra of militias in March, followed by operations to clear Sadr City and Amara, has transformed the Iraqi political environment no less than the security environment. Iraqi forces, supported by the coalition, shattered the Sadrist and Iranian-controlled leadership of Moktada al-Sadr's Mahdi army, of the criminal Shia gangs Iranian agents were cynically paying and using, and even of the Special Groups more tightly controlled by Iran. Iraqi and coalition forces killed hundreds of militia fighters and lead-

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ers, and thousands more fled, many leaving Iraq. Ira-

plished, the Iraqis cleared the rest of Sadr City on their

The Kurdish parliament discusses the future of the oil city of Kirkuk, June 8, 2008.

KHALID MOHAMMED / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

nian-backed militias initially fought very hard in Basra and Sadr City, but then broke completely. By the time Iraqi forces moved into Amara, the remaining Shia militants had no stomach for a fight.

Maliki ordered the Basra operation on his own, against the advice of coalition commanders. The initial operation, inadequately planned and prepared, looked very ugly. The coalition rushed assistance to Basra in the form of planning staff, intelligence and air assets, and military advisers—but no combat formations. The Iraqi military also rushed reinforcements to the city, including the Quick Reaction Force of the 1st Iraqi Army Division based in Anbar. That formation, with a high proportion of Sunnis, marched into combat against Shia militias in an overwhelmingly Shia city—and were received as liberators. And after the initial setbacks, the Iraqi soldiers fought hard. The process was repeated in Sadr City, although coalition forces initially did play a significant role in direct combat in order to stop the rocket attacks on the Green Zone. Once that was accom-

own, with the same mix of enablers the coalition had provided in Basra (albeit on a larger scale).

These surprising successes—which resulted from Maliki's initiative and occurred over initial coalition objections—have raised Maliki's stature in Iraq to a level never before seen. The change is palpable. Talking to Sunni sheikhs recently, I found a new tolerance for Maliki, whom they now see as someone who is at least sometimes willing to take on his own constituency for the good of the country. Many Sunni Arab leaders remain angry about Maliki's advisers' sectarian tendencies, but for the first time in my experience, Sunni Arabs are distinguishing between the prime minister and those around him.

Maliki himself—and even some of those "evil advisers"—learned interesting lessons from Basra. Hardline Shias in government have long feared the re-creation of a Sunni-domi-

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The proliferation of parties is not entirely desirable. As part of legislative and electoral coalitions, they might compete more directly with the larger parties. Iraqi politics tends to be noisy, chaotic, and unpredictable. But the key point is, it is politics.

nated Iraqi army that could become, at least in their minds, a sectarian coup force. That is one of the chief reasons for early Shia efforts to seize control of the Ministry of the Interior, which oversees the National Police and the provincial Iraqi Police: Since the Shia believed they were preparing for sectarian civil war, it made sense to develop an independent Shia paramilitary force. But when the chips were down in Basra, it was not the interior ministry or the police that came to Maliki's rescue, but the Iraqi army—in the person of Defense Minister Abdul Qadr, a Sunni, and the Anbar-based Quick Reaction Force, which reinforced the city. Maliki and some of his advisers have taken note of that fact, and relationships even within the most senior governmental ranks have been shifting.

The destruction of the Sadrist Trend not only as a paramilitary force, but also as a cohesive political force, has also had profound consequences. Sadr himself did not stir from Iran while his loyalists were being hammered by Iraqi and coalition forces. Many of his movement's leaders were captured, killed, or driven off. The government's declaration that no political party would be allowed to compete in the elections without disarming its militia has broken up the Sadrist Trend as a political movement as well. Sadrist leaders who remain in Iraq are running as independents or joining other parties. Some say that they will re-form a Sadrist political movement after the elections, but it will almost certainly be a far weaker force than the one that gripped Baghdad with fear for so long.

Among Iraq's Sunni Arabs, tension with the central government remains high, but electoral politics are beginning to overshadow that tension. In Anbar, the leaders of the Awakening movement that helped defeat Al Qaeda in Iraq have formed a powerful political party. They mean to defeat the Iraq Islamic party and become the voice of Anbar. The IIP is responding to the challenge in various ways—some legitimate, and some less so. Everyone in Iraq thinks that one party or another will try to rig or steal the elections. Everyone I talked to said it would be best if there were an American soldier standing by every ballot box. They're probably right on both counts. But no one suggested that they did not intend to abide by the results of the elections. Of course, every party is confident that it will win.

Iraq's ethno-sectarian wounds have not healed—one might best say that they are starting to scab over. Tensions remain high along the Arab-Kurdish fault line in Ninewa, Kirkuk, and Diyala Provinces. Sectarian tensions are also high between Sunni and Shia Arabs in Diyala and in and around Baghdad. Nor are the Iraqi security forces quite as ready to take full responsibility for keeping the precarious peace as some of Iraq's leaders suppose. Flush with success and eager to appear strong and independent as elections approach, some of Iraq's leaders exaggerate their own capabilities, something that complicates our negotiations for a strategic partnership, among other things.

But even the most extreme of these hubristic Shia advisers strongly favor a partnership with the United States. "Iraq is flying west," one of them told me over a dinner of rice, kabobs, and *masghouf* (a fish dish). The debate over the details of the military arrangements for 2009 has overshadowed a much more important point, he said, echoing the comments of the young people at the party headquarters we visited: Iraq wants American help of every kind. The security arrangements must be seen within the context of this larger partnership, he added. Like American politicians, of course, he and the rest of Iraq's leaders have to figure out how to sell any specific agreement to the parliament—and to the voters. That makes negotiations difficult, but it is also the strongest possible sign of hope in Iraq.

The whole purpose of the surge was to transform the conflict over power in Iraq from a military to a political struggle. We and the Iraqis have accomplished that goal—for now. But the most critical period in the birth of a new Iraq lies ahead. America can stand beside this fractious and sometimes violent young state whose people are now passionate about democracy. Or we can abandon them to their enemies, to their own fears and insecurities, and to the fragility of their months-old efforts at real reconciliation. It is a weighty choice, but not a hard one for anyone who has seen the vision of a possible future Iraq. ♦

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The Fannie and Freddie Follies

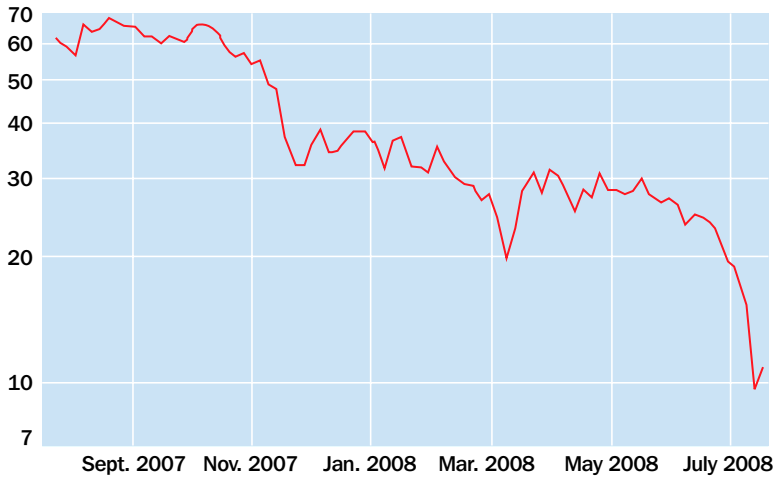
Spare the rod, spoil the child.

By Lawrence B. Lindsey

Should the United States drop into a historically memorable economic downturn in the near future—a clearly possible if far from certain event—economic historians will likely cite July 11, 2008, as a critical date. It will be not unlike October 28, 1929, which we know today as Black Monday. I propose that future historians call it "Fickle Friday" for the confusing signals out of Washington whipsawed the market and led to a diminution of confidence in the government's ability to right the financial system.

Dawn broke on the East Coast that Friday with our two biggest Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs), Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, trading down 50 percent from their close the day before. These two are the main conduit through which home mortgages pass in the marketplace. The proximate cause of their problems was a *New York Times* story saying that the Bush administration had plans to nationalize them and wipe out their equity value in the process. After the story broke, a mildly positive day in the European markets turned to one of major losses, and New York markets were set to open sharply lower. Nearly everyone associated with the money markets was talking about how the government would have to do something and soon.

Fannie Mae stock price, *July 17, 2007-July 17, 2008*



SOURCE: YAHOO, INC.

The Bush administration began the day of confusing signals by announcing a presidential event at 11 o'clock—which turned out to be about gas prices—and a National Economic Council "Administration announcement" at 4 P.M., which turned out to be about an EPA issue. There was also to be a 10 A.M. statement by Treasury secretary Henry Paulson, which was widely hyped. It ended up being delayed by 25 minutes and turned the hopes of a rally based on great expectations into a midday fizzle. The secretary did not appear, and a written statement was released saying, "Today our primary focus is supporting Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in their current form as they carry out their important mission." The markets viewed the phrase "in their current form" as showing some real detachment between policymakers and the facts on the ground. Equities were rapidly sold off, hitting lows not seen for two years.

But Senate Democrats improved on the administration's record for confusion. The Senate had been working on a Federal Housing Administration reform bill, sponsored by banking committee chairman Christopher Dodd, all week. One of the key provisions was a tax on all of Fannie's and Freddie's lending, amounting to about $300 to $400 on each mortgage. No sensible person could think that imposing heavier taxes on institutions whose stocks were in a death

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THE WEEKLY STANDARD

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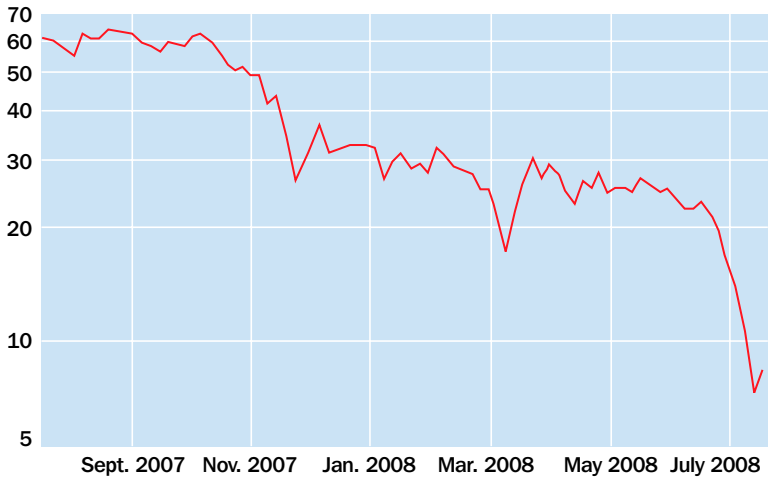
spiral was a good idea. But the taxes were dedicated to a new housing slush fund that would go to (largely Democratic) governors, mayors, and left-leaning community groups like ACORN. (The last—the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now—would be a leading recipient of the bill's largesse despite, or perhaps because of, its being one of the few institutions in the country to have seven of its members convicted of voter fraud for generating fictitious voter lists.)

Then at 2 o'clock in the afternoon Senator Dodd went in front of the television cameras to defend Fannie and Freddie. He said that they were sound institutions, had access to capital, and had significantly tightened their lending standards. Then he mentioned that he had been in conversations with the Treasury and the Fed about the possibility of providing a new liquidity facility to Fannie and Freddie. Markets began to turn. Reuters piled on with a story that Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke had told Freddie Mac CEO Dick Syron that they would have access to the discount window to cover any short-term liquidity crises. The Dow, which had been down nearly 200 points skyrocketed to positive territory. It turned out the Reuters story was false, but the Dodd statement had given them sufficient grounds to run it, and the Fed did not deny it until after the markets closed. Still, equities were turning back down at the close as cooler heads realized there was enormous uncertainty about the soundness of the housing giants and about the size or form of any government bailout.

Freddie Mac stock price, *July 17, 2007-July 17, 2008*



SOURCE: YAHOO, INC.

But the day was not over as far as senatorial input was concerned. In the oddest moment, Senate majority leader Harry Reid issued a statement saying that all Senate Democrats had confidence in the GSEs. Then at 5 P.M., the Office of Thrift Supervision (OTS) closed IndyMac, a California mortgage lender. In a written statement, the OTS said that the "immediate cause" of the failure was Senator Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat. Back in June, Schumer had sent a letter to the OTS questioning the bank's condition, a letter he then released to the press. A bank run followed with depositors withdrawing $1.3 billion in 11 days. It is the second largest bank failure in American history. According to the *Wall Street Journal* it will ultimately cost the bank insurance fund between $4 and $8 billion. Schumer shot back saying the OTS should concentrate on doing its job rather than pointing fingers.

These Washington follies exposed two big weaknesses in the governmental underpinnings of the American financial system. First, the government's backing of Freddie and Fannie puts them in a box. The chaos around the GSEs indicated to the markets that the authorities would have to offer some kind of bailout. So, on Saturday, when Paulson called around to various investment banks urging them to buy debt that was going to be issued by Freddie Mac on Monday, he was met with a very cool response. Why should private institutions put their money at risk if the government already believed that it would have to be the investor of last resort? If the nation's finance minister was reduced to playing bond salesman for a private company, moreover, it would stand to reason that things must be pretty bad.

Second, the Schumer-inspired collapse of IndyMac will, over the coming few weeks, remind people that not all deposits in banks are insured; in fact, roughly one third are not. The FDIC only insures deposits up to $100,000 in each account. IndyMac had a fairly wealthy clientele, and, when they find that they may not get all their money back, it will become national news. This is how bank runs start. People with large accounts tend to be quite sophisticated and will rapidly move their deposits to Treasury bills or other investments. In the last banking crisis in the late 1980s, FDIC chairman Bill Seidman was able to protect nearly all of these uninsured depositors by merging institutions. But in 1991, Congress in its infinite wisdom, made this far more difficult to do the next time—i.e. this time. (This is a story that will unfold in coming weeks.)

The more immediate crisis for Washington was what

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to do that would help Freddie Mac raise money Monday morning. Goldman Sachs, Paulson's old firm, had been charged with trying to place the debt issue and was failing. Late Sunday afternoon, before markets opened in Tokyo 13 time zones away, Paulson announced a three-point plan, which amounted to a request for Congress to issue a blank check to the Treasury Department to both extend loans and purchase the equities of Fannie and Freddie. The reaction in each of the world's markets was initially positive, but was quickly followed by a sell-off as investors considered the plan. Having the GSEs fail was unthinkable, but putting their losses on the books of the federal government wasn't a great idea either.

There are three important concerns that continue to weigh on markets. First, Fannie and Freddie—despite the protestations of their champions in the Democratic caucus on Capitol Hill—are not well capitalized. Why else would Paulson be requesting a blank check for the government to inject equity capital? Unlike what Paulson said in his formal statement, there really is no way that Fannie and Freddie can come through this "in their current form."

A look at Freddie Mac's own accounting statements shows that using the "fair value" method that includes some of their off balance sheet positions, the firm's net worth is *negative* $5 billion. Freddie has set aside a total of $14 billion to guarantee a total of $1.8 trillion in loans, enough for a loss rate of just 0.8 percent. Should their loss rate rise to 5 percent, which is conceivable in this housing market, they would be nearly $80 billion under water.

The problem at Fannie seems less acute on the surface. It would take a 1.5 percent swing in either their assets or their liabilities to make them insolvent under fair value accounting. But, they have $112 billion in exposure to mortgage insurance companies, like PMI and Radian, whose share prices have been rapidly dropping. These potential losses would require a level of capital injection from the Treasury so high as to be politically impossible. But, if the government is unwilling to pony up the huge sums that might be needed in the extreme, then any money put in now would simply be lost.

The second problem plaguing the Paulson plan is that despite open-ended commitments, there was no explicit sacrifice being asked of the existing management or shareholders. The plan appeared to be so generous that the share prices of these supposedly failed enterprises actually rose as markets opened. The smart money on Wall Street, moreover, had already bet on some form of government bailout by buying the preferred stock and subordinated debt of these two companies at a steep discount. Paulson's announcement produced billions of dollars in windfall profits for those who placed a bet that the government would indeed blink. This money did nothing to improve the access to mortgages for America's homebuyers; it was a direct transfer to Wall Street's investment banks and hedge funds.

Third, the Paulson plan undermined confidence in other financial institutions. There are plenty of ordinary commercial banks in the country that need to raise capital to restore their balance sheets. But Paulson signaled that even institutions that had the implicit backing of Uncle Sam like Fannie and Freddie could now effectively raise capital only from the Treasury and not from private markets. The stocks of many troubled banks—Washington Mutual, Wachovia, and National City for just three examples—plunged steeply in Monday's trading. The bank stock index had its worst fall in more than 10 years, dropping 8 percent at one point.

This leaves the question of what to do now. I do not share the view of some conservatives that we should just let the market handle it, though they are right that we should never have gotten ourselves into this mess by creating a for-profit company that comes to the government whenever it needs money. But, we are where we are and need to learn from our mistakes.

The key to repairing the GSEs is to make sure that existing shareholders and management pay a price if they get bailed out. Ideally common shareholders should see the values of their shares reduced to zero, or close to zero. Investors in other parts of the capital structure who knew they were taking risks should have their investments written down—taking a "haircut" in Wall Street parlance. But the bondholders, who supply the capital to homeowners, should be largely protected.

Government investment in the capital structure gives government control. We should avail ourselves of this opportunity to wind down the scale and scope of the government's involvement in the mortgage market. While mortgage securitization might at one time have been a specialized "high tech" financial innovation needing the government, it is not today. Homeowners, investors, and taxpayers would all benefit from having a more competitive mortgage securitization market with many well-capitalized private participants who are responsive to market discipline. The market share of Fannie and Freddie needs to be reduced.

Finally, we need to put financial regulation out of the reach of politicians seeking time before the television cameras. Bank supervision works only when it is done quietly, letting the regulator and the bank solve problems out of the glare of the limelight. Senators should not be spreading panic for political gain. Market discipline, by contrast, is done under the glare of publicity and full disclosure. The lessons of Fickle Friday should remind us that we need discipline in Washington, as well as in the financial markets, if we are to come through this crisis in good stead. ♦

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George Bailey (James Stewart) and depositors at the Bailey Building and Loan Association

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Getting and Spending

Alas, it's the American way BY IRWIN M. STELZER

Professor Wilcox has managed to cram not one, but two, important and readable books into 176 pages.

Not that such was his intention. But his discussion of why Americans have decided, in massive numbers, that current consumption is far more gratifying than thrift is only loosely and occasionally connected to the policy prescriptions that follow. Either would make worthwhile reading; both, between one set of covers, give the lie to the Washington view—developed during the Clinton administration and revived during the recent primaries—that "two for the price of one" inevitably produces a disaster.

I should begin by pointing out that Wilcox almost lost my goodwill on the second page, where he writes: "Some Americans go crazy with their credit cards—purchasing, for example, a watch accurate to the nanosecond that displays the time in eight different time zones—rather than saving that money for retirement." As one who recently purchased a relatively inexpensive timepiece that can tell time in 20 time zones, if I could figure out how to set it, I did not appreciate having an academic (Darden School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia) passing judgment on my choice between current and future consumption.

Whatever Happened to Thrift?
Why Americans Don't Save and What to Do About It
by Ronald T. Wilcox
Yale, 176 pp., $30

Wilcox never fully answers what he calls the economists' contention that saving is a matter of individual choice, "and questions about 'too much' or 'too little' have a moral punch that is not relevant to the decision making of rational people." Nor is he willing to say "with . . . conviction whether Americans' current wealth accumulations, both realized and unrealized, are sufficient for their long-term financial well-being."

Which is a good thing, because none of the data now available to us tell how Americans will save from current income now that they cannot count on rising house prices to make them richer—even though they spend their entire paychecks, and then some. But he does make a reasoned and never-overstated case that there are grounds to worry about the precipitous decline in our reported savings rate, which is now below that of every other developed country.

First, many Americans worry that their savings rate is too low, even as they spend and spend. So there might be an element of irrationality in their refusal to worry about the future. Such seemingly irrational behavior is the subject of an increasing literature that

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attempts to integrate economic theory with the work of students of consumer and worker behavior.

Second, there are macroeconomic consequences of a low national savings rate. We have to borrow from abroad to fund our consumption, and that puts us at the mercy of not-too-friendly governments that might, one day, decide they have more pictures of presidents in their vaults than they care to have, and sell them off in a rush.

That would accelerate the current decline of the dollar, trigger inflation, and force the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates to shore up the value of our currency and nip inflation in its incipiency—perhaps at a time when the economy is slowing down. And in order to peddle the IOUs we are creating, our government would have to offer higher and higher interest rates to countries flush with investable and lendable capital because of the high savings rates of their citizens.

In the measured fashion that characterizes this book, Wilcox concludes, "While those who predict a near-term crisis are probably overstating the case, the horizon holds both risks of large economy-wide problems and near certainties of hardship for many U.S. households." The latter is a reference to Wilcox's concern that the poor do not have sufficient stores of income-yielding assets—no surprise, although something he (surprisingly) finds "one of the more striking results" of his studies.

So why do we save so little? Here Wilcox draws on a variety of disciplines. But he begins by dismissing those who argue that we are the pliant victims of "lecherous corporations"—to blame them is a "convenient lie"—and their ad agencies, or of banks that drop unrequested credit cards in our mail boxes: "Blaming the American savings problem on credit cards is like blaming America's obesity problem on McDonald's."

No, the fault, dear reader, is not in the manipulative skills of others, nor in the tempting aroma of fries emanating from fast-food shops, but in ourselves.

It is difficult to do justice to Wilcox's analysis in summary, but I will try. We all have "reference groups"—family, friends, coworkers—that influence our spending patterns. An academic can get a clue as to the car he should be driving by looking at the university parking lot: business school professors drive new cars, English professors older issues of the same brands. Volvos good, giant SUVs bad. Smith & Wesson bumper stickers are not a good idea in Charlottesville; better a "W" with a slash through it.

"Of course," writes Wilcox, "no one actually tells you these things; you just know them."

Unfortunately, the clues you get from your reference group are "one-sided." You notice the Porsche more than the Toyota, the old heart-of-pine floors in a colleague's house: "And, over time, my beliefs about what constitutes an appropriate level of consumption for my reference group shift towards extraordinary items that generally are more extravagant and costly than what I currently own." Apparently, no one in Professor Wilcox's reference group favors multi-time-zone watches.

This is more than the traditional keeping-up-with-the-Joneses; it is keeping up with the most expensive items owned by each of the Joneses you get to know: It is "the progenitor of financially reckless behavior." Add to this our natural optimism about the future, and the moral hazard created by our belief that the government will bail us out if we get in trouble, and you have what Wilcox sees as a prescription for a belief that, in the unlikely event that a rainy day does occur, someone will appear with an umbrella.

Of course, our optimism has not been misplaced in the past. It is only in recent years that our cheery view of our economic future has been dimmed by a stall in the increase in real incomes for many families. So it did make sense for a young couple to buy a house that is beyond their current means; incomes will rise and turn that seeming extravagance into a prudent investment. Especially since house prices seemed to be on a one-way escalator, and real (inflation-adjusted) interest rates have been relatively low, "a powerful disincentive to save."

Nor have Americans been foolish to believe that the government will unfurl an umbrella to shield them when a rainy day comes around, witness the shareholders of Bear Stearns who were paid $10 per share for a bankrupt company, thanks to the government's intervention. Or the homeowners, deserving and undeserving, who are likely to be saved from losing homes many should not have bought by the unlikely combination of Barney Frank and Henry Paulsen. Or consumers who benefit from relaxed bankruptcy laws.

Moral hazard is not a theoretical concept invented by economists; it is an important, real-life factor in persuading some businesses and consumers that they need not worry if risky behavior gets them into trouble. Uncle Sam will ride to the rescue.

When Wilcox turns to policies that might encourage us to save more, he starts with the assumption that "it would be intellectually dishonest to ignore the hard reality that when we advocate policies that disallow failure, the outcomes of good choices and bad choices become similar. This diminishes the incentives for people to delay immediate gratification and make good choices—one of which is certainly saving money." Some readers might recall that, many years ago, Irving Kristol emphasized that postponement of gratification is necessary if capitalist economies are to accumulate the savings pools needed to fund the investment that is the key to increasing productivity and well-being.

In the second part of his book, Wilcox turns to policies that might increase Americans' propensity to save. He eliminates "coercive measures . . . that is not the reality of American politics." But there is much, he contends, that both government and employers can do. This list of public policy measures includes the long-needed reform of our system to tax consumption, rather than savings. Such a reform, he argues, would tax the benefits of wealth (the ability of the rich to buy what they want), and can be made progressive, or at least less regressive, by exempting some minimum level of consumption, or certain products.

Here, Wilcox underestimates the devilishness of working out the details. In Great Britain, children's clothing is exempt, but there is now some discus-

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sion of whether certain brassiere sizes can any longer be classified as being only for adults, and therefore subject to tax. Or whether the exemption of food from tax should allow consumers to eat cake, tax-free. Better a flat dollar exemption than an ever-changing list of exempt products.

Wilcox's to-do list for government goes on to include a low-cost retirement system for employees of small businesses, a reinvigorated marketing of government savings bonds, fuller disclosure of mutual fund charges, and targeted financial education, among other measures. All unexceptional.

But his suggestion that Americans in the lowest 25 percent of adjusted gross income should be allowed to divert 3 percent of their Social Security contributions to a government-managed, pure domestic index stock mutual fund is less obviously a good idea. "Holding stocks makes sense for almost everyone, rich and poor," he says. Perhaps, in the long run, but even then not certainly. But what of those who retire during, or immediately after, a protracted market downturn? And what if participants lose money? Wilcox concedes that moral hazard might rear its unlovely head: "There is the potential for political pressure to bail them out."

You can count on it.

Employers could help by choosing pension plans with low fees, automatically enrolling employees in 401(k) plans unless they opt out, and limiting their own consumption because, like it or not, employers are in their employees' "reference group." And workers "infer that you [employers] view others with similar consumption patterns more favorably."

I wonder. A worker might, instead, guess that if he pulls up alongside the boss in the company parking lot in the same car, wears the same custom-tailored suits, and joins the same country club, his employer will begin to check the petty cash drawer, or audit expense accounts, or snoop around to see if there is some extracurricular dealing on the shop floor.

But this is a quibble. There is much in *Whatever Happened to Thrift?* worth thinking about—interesting stuff, and sufficiently well written to be accessible to any reader. ♦

THE WASHINGTON POST WRITERS GROUP

Daddies Dearest

A 'shrewd, witty' look at the men in our lives.

BY MYRNA BLYTH

While doing some research in preparation for writing this review of Kathleen Parker's shrewd and witty book, I came upon a promotion for "Save the Males multi-benefit moisturizer," a for-men-only "lotion with Carrot Protein and other natural activists [that] supports skin, so it stays healthy and hydrated. Chinese Wolfberry and Mangosteen Extract offer powerful antioxidant protection. And White Birch takes a firm stance against the formation of fine lines and wrinkles."

Save the Males
Why Men Matter, Why Women Should Care
by Kathleen Parker
Random House, 240 pp., $26

Obviously, the manufacturer of Save the Males knows there are enough men out there who care about Mangosteen Extract to cough up $32.50 for 2.5 fluid ounces of this high-priced grease. Still, one might wonder, as Kathleen Parker does, what has happened to men today that the firm stance they take is in favor of hydrating? And why, for goodness' sake, do women now want to go cheek-to-cheek with guys who are redolent of Chinese Wolfberry?

Kathleen Parker

Parker, a respected syndicated columnist and occasional cultural provocateur, as well as a wife, mother of sons, and a daughter raised throughout much of her childhood by a single father, searches for answers to questions such as these as she analyzes the changing role of men in society today. She maintains that, during the past decades, the benefits of manliness, the importance of fatherhood, and even the energy and high spirits of young boys have all been drastically devalued. And who can really argue with that notion when a book entitled *Are Men Necessary?* written by *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd climbed the bestseller list just last year, and was taken seriously.

As Parker writes in an opening salvo, "In the process of fashioning a more female-friendly world, we've created a culture that is hostile towards males, contemptuous of masculinity and cynical about the delightful differences that make men irresistible, especially when something goes bump in the night." She notes that, from the time boys go to school, those "delightful differences" too often are seen as problems rather than proclivities. Faced with female teachers who often admit that they don't like little boys who can't sit still the way little girls can and a girl-powered curriculum that emphasizes female achievement—in one schoolbook George Washington receives fewer than 50 lines of text while Marilyn Monroe receives more than 200—boys

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often end up not liking or doing well in the classroom.

"As we strived to make school girl-friendly to accommodate Ophelia," notes Parker, "we've bored Hamlet to distraction." Not surprisingly, many boys drop out, and of those who do graduate from high school, fewer go on to college. By 2012 women are expected to be awarded 60 percent of bachelor's degrees in America.

Popular culture has done its male-bashing part as well. There is TV's Sitcom Man, Homer Simpson on *The Simpsons* or Ray Barone on *Everybody Loves Raymond*, the hapless father who never knows best and is always the easy butt of every family joke. In film and music, men and boys are often portrayed as bullies, brutes, or sexual predators. Haven't we been so primed by woman-as-victim Movies-of-the Week and *Law & Order* to believe that any young man could be a potential rapist? Certainly that was part of the reason the media, the college administration, and much of the public rushed to judgment when three white Duke lacrosse players were accused of raping an African-American stripper at a team party.

Writes Parker, "As the Duke case makes abundantly clear we don't hesitate to condemn males no matter the circumstances, no matter the credibility of the accuser, or the absence of evidence."

Perhaps Parker's greatest concern, however, is the diminished role of fathers in American family life. Nowadays, dads are often seen as clueless, uncaring, or irresponsible. Fathers who want to be involved in their children's lives can be marginalized by divorce laws and custody arrangements that always favor Mom.

"If once upon a time mothers were treated unfairly in a male-dominated culture, fathers today are the victims of what seems like a revenge manifesto," Parker writes. A stunning statistic: America leads the Western world in mothers-only families. Europeans may have a higher incident of out-of-wedlock births, but the majority of those are children born to unmarried but cohabitating couples.

A recent, chilling case that seems to prove Parker's observation that we have become the society where fathers hardly matter: the news report of 17 pregnant teenage girls, none older than 16, in a high school in Gloucester, Massachusetts. According to the high school's principal, one of the girls chose a "a twenty-four-year-old homeless man" to supply her with the necessary sperm. Obviously, she was not concerned with what kind of dad he would be, because the girls were planning to raise the children together. And though one might say that these immature and foolish teenagers were more influenced by last year's hit movie *Juno* than by any serious anti-male sentiments, even in that movie the seemingly tidy ending is when Juno, the teenage mother, hands her baby over to an older childless woman—but one who is about to divorce her hapless, immature husband and will raise the child alone.

Parker's greatest concern is the diminished role of fathers in American family life. Nowadays, dads are often seen as clueless, uncaring, or irresponsible, while divorce laws and custody arrangements seem always to favor Mom.

Parker lays the blame for the marginalizing of males to the modern feminist movement, which began in the late 1960s and belittled men as much as it encouraged women to achieve. She does quite a job on some longtime feminist icons, especially those who focus on encouraging women to enthusiastically celebrate their sexuality, such as Eve Ensler, author of the spectacularly successful *Vagina Monologues*, and other "Vulva Sherpas" such as Dr. Betty Dobson, a sexologist "who teaches women how to pleasure themselves." Parker is at her funniest in this chapter, entitled "The Vagina Diatribes and the Sacred Clitorati," where she writes, "There is yet another sentence that makes no sense to men. Women have to be *taught?*"

She also complains that feminism's daughters and granddaughters—the *Sex in the City* hookup generation and their pre-puberty little sisters wearing "Future Porn Star" T-shirts—may have been encouraged to embrace their sexuality perhaps too enthusiastically, and to their detriment. Just think of those pregnant Gloucester teens. And, Parker notes, if one expects very little of young men in the way of responsibility or caring, that is exactly what young women get in return.

Yes, there are now lots of misunderstandings, blunders, and sexual harassment suits in the new war between the sexes. Parker writes:

> Torpedoed by cultural messages that are relentlessly sexual, by pole-dancing moms and prostitots decked in baby hookerware, [men] are nevertheless expected to treat females as ladies. Except don't call them 'ladies' which is insultingly patriarchal. . . . The deal is basically this. Females can flaunt their foliage when, where, and how they choose, and you men have to be psychics to respond appropriately.

Throughout *Save the Males*, Parker is full of good sense and sympathy but, at the same time, is realistic about men the way only a wife and the mother of sons can be. She kept telling her family that they had better shape up or she simply couldn't keep writing this book. But she says she plowed ahead, not only because she wanted to save the males but because she is interested in saving females, too.

She believes our families and our country need men who have those old-fashioned virtues of honor and courage, and accept their responsibilities. For when we expect and allow men to be men, at the same time we greatly benefit women and children. ♦

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Manmohan Singh (India), Nicolas Sarkozy (France), Thabo Mbeki (South Africa), and friend.

GETTY IMAGES

Indispensable Nation

The tradition lives on. **BY GARY SCHMITT**

As we've already seen, much of the presidential campaign will be about how the candidates can distance themselves from the foreign and defense policies of the Bush administration. The underlying presumptions are that it is possible to move forward with a substantially new agenda, or return to the halcyon days of the 1990s. But these two new books reveal just how problematic, and probably unrealistic, those presumptions are.

America Between the Wars
From 11/9 to 9/11
by Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier
PublicAffairs, 432 pp., $27.95

After Bush
The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy
by Timothy J. Lynch and Robert S. Singh
Cambridge, 396 pp., $28

America Between the Wars is a remarkably evenhanded and serious review of U.S. security policy between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the attacks on New York and the Pentagon in the fall of 2001. Although both Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier held positions in the Clinton administration, the book is no partisan taking of accounts. To the contrary, judicious in tone, and especially insightful about the various meanderings of the political parties during the first decade-plus of the post-Cold War era, this volume will likely stand as the definitive overview of that period for some time to come.

Chollet and Goldgeier, however, are not writing a history for the sake of writing a history. Their larger point is to stress that much (if not most) of what we are dealing with today—whether issues of terrorism, economic globalization, the rise of China, weapons proliferation, the utility of international institutions and our alliances, the possibilities and limits to the exercise of American primacy and leadership—all came to the fore in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

"The ideas and dynamics that characterize the current era took shape" well before George W. Bush ever stepped into the Oval Office, they write. In short, "just as history did not end on 11/9, it did not begin on 9/11."

What *America Between the Wars* is especially adept at is reminding the reader of just how chaotic Washington's response to the end of the Cold War was. For all of the first Bush administration's accomplishments in helping to unite Germany and rallying the world to turn back Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, it could only leave behind a slogan, a hope, for a "new world order." Divided on whether that meant a more assertive American leadership abroad, as outlined in the infamous Defense Policy Guidance of 1992, or a less forward-leaning realism, as exhibited in the equally infamous statement on the Balkans conflict by Secretary of State James Baker that we didn't "have a dog in that fight," the Bush team left office with the country strategically adrift.

Matters hardly improved during Bill Clinton's first years in office. With a president whose interest in foreign affairs was slight to begin with, and weak hands at State (Warren Christopher), Defense (Les Aspin), and the National Security Council (Anthony Lake), the result was a predictable incoherence as the new administration tackled such problems as Somalia, Haiti, North Korea, and Bosnia. Not only did the United States look adrift, it looked weak, as well.

Conservatives, as Chollet and Goldgeier point out, were hardly in better shape. When the Gingrich-led forces took control of the House of Representatives in 1995, the vast majority of the new members sounded more like Patrick Buchanan than Ronald Reagan when it came to foreign affairs. This was reflected in the "Contract With America," which had virtually nothing to say about America's role in the world. And although some Republicans eventually came around to criticizing the Clinton administration's decision to allow defense spending (especially for weapons procurement and readiness) to slide downward, there were just as many who thought the books should be balanced by pulling back from foreign engagements or, if they were in favor of increased spending, were at a loss to explain exactly why.

Equally well done is their account of the various comings and goings of the

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neoconservatives. Chollet and Goldgeier remind us that some neocons initially supported the Clinton campaign in 1992 on the candidate's pledge to promote a foreign policy with a more moral cast, while others declared that, with the end of communism, game, set, and match had gone to the West and the United States could return to being a more "normal country." As Chollet and Goldgeier point out, that most infamous of neocon efforts, the Project for the New American Century (which I helped run for nearly a decade), was in part established in an effort to do battle with that latter sentiment. And, as they also correctly note, PNAC's success on that front was certainly more mixed than all the conspiracy theories would have it.

Indeed, one of the impressive features of *America Between the Wars* is its willingness to highlight those features of the Clinton years that the most vociferous critics of the Bush administration see as having originated since 9/11. Lest anyone forget, when it came to Bosnia, for example, the Clinton administration's "approach had a gloss of allied involvement and buy-in, but in the end was unilateral, rejecting U.N. participation and keeping allies at arm's length. The United States acted first and consulted later." Similarly, as Chollet and Goldgeier note, the war over Kosovo was a "war of choice," and one waged without the sanction of the United Nations.

Nor, finally, was the problem of Iraq some wholesale invention by the Bush White House and the nefarious neocon cabal. Time and again, the Clinton team had to deal with a crisis generated by Saddam Hussein. And it was Bill Clinton himself, in a Pentagon speech in 1998, who made the link between Iraq, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism. Moreover, Clinton's team knew that the policy of containment was in free fall, and having no stomach "for bearing the costs and consequences of a full-scale invasion," they would (in NSC adviser Samuel Berger's words) be leaving it "up to [the next] administration to decide what to do."

Although reluctant to pull the trigger when it came to Iraq—or, for that matter, when it came to the other hot spots—the Clinton administration found itself at the end espousing the idea that the United States was the "indispensable nation." And with good reason. American leadership had been critical in expanding NATO, ending the slaughter in the Balkans, solving the Mexican financial crisis, expanding free trade, and deterring Chinese threats against Taiwan. But as Clinton himself understood, and Chollet and Goldgeier make clear, free trade and the exercise of American power were not policies that sat easily among their own party's left wing. And so the obvious question to ask now is, with the Bush presidency ending, whether an Obama administration would pick up where the Clinton team left off, or would it let itself be defined, at least initially, by the Democrats' post-Iraq rages?

I say initially because there is an argument that no presidency can ultimately be successful when it comes to foreign affairs if it eschews the exercise of power. The world being what it is, and American interests and principles being what they are, it is unlikely any president can get by playing the role of reluctant leader—as George W. Bush came to discover as well. It's not that a new administration has to go looking for trouble; more likely than not, trouble will find it.

In *After Bush*, Timothy Lynch and Robert Singh lay out the case, with incisive scholarly detail, why there is likely to be—and should be—more constancy in American foreign policy in the coming years than not. What is a bit unusual about this volume and its argument is that it is made by two British academics. But then again, this gives Lynch and Singh the advantage of seeing beyond the current partisan disputes about George W. Bush and the war in Iraq and identifying what they believe are the longer-term continuities that have driven, and will likely continue to animate, America's security policies in the future.

Citing analysis by Robert Kagan and Ivo Daalder, they note that, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to 2003, presidents have decided to use significant military force on nine separate occasions, with more than half those decisions being made by a Democrat sitting in the White House. What's more, for all the talk about the imperial presidency of George W. Bush, Lynch and Singh note that not once did Bill Clinton obtain congressional authorization for his use of the military.

Nor, if Barack Obama's words last year to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs are to be taken seriously, have we seen the end of American unilateralism or the possibility of preemption. Declared Obama: "No president should ever hesitate to use force—unilaterally if necessary—to protect ourselves and our vital interest when we are attacked or imminently threatened." And like Bush, Obama sees "this century's threats"—the combination of "rogue states allied to terrorists" and weapons of mass destruction "fall[ing] into the hands of terrorists"—"as dangerous as and in some ways more complex than those we have confronted in the past."

Of course, Lynch and Singh are not naive about the difference an individual president can make in shaping security policy. But as they pointedly note, "For all their recent acrimony, Democrats and Republicans have more in common with each other on foreign policy than they do even with their closest allies in Europe and Asia."

There are a number of reasons for this. The first is the consensus about the character of the threats the United States faces, especially from Islamist terrorism. Second, and equally important, is the fact that there doesn't appear to be any realistic alternative to the exercise of American primacy. Balance of power scenarios, handing things off to the U.N., isolationism—none offers much prospect of long-term stability, let alone security. And there is the unique American strategic vision that pursues its universalist aspirations with the tools of power (soft and hard) and trade.

Moreover, as *After Bush* argues, when you step back and take an honest account of how all of this has played out in practice, you see that, on balance, this American approach to the world has been successful. Whether it is the peace enjoyed by the democracies of the world, or the advances made in

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the war on terror, the existing approach to foreign policy has served Americans and their allies well.

Nor have the costs been as high as critics claim. Defense spending as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product remains lower, as Lynch and Singh note, than what the federal government spends on Social Security and substantially less (by nearly a factor of three!) on welfare programs altogether. And for all the talk about the unpopularity of the Bush White House abroad, there has been no seismic shift in the international order: America's allies remain about where they have been during the past 20 years, as have relations with the would-be competitor state of China. (Interestingly, immigration from Arabic-speaking countries to the United States has actually gone up since 9/11.)

All that said, Lynch and Singh understand that George W. Bush's central strategic goal—the transformation of the Middle East—will not come easily, and may well require a "reformation" within Islam that is scarcely under the control of the United States and the West.

Yet, as difficult as that task may be, as Lynch and Singh point out, the United States has been here before. A president comes to office, lacking an electoral mandate. He is a "notoriously incurious and relatively provincial man," who soon faces a loss of control of Congress while having to address an extraordinarily difficult new security crisis. He offers up a "sweeping vision" to address that crisis, "essentially dividing the world into those who are with or against America" while, at the same time, undertaking "far-reaching" changes in the government's security organizations. And finally, that president leaves office with "his popularity at its lowest ebb" and the country "mired in a seemingly unwinnable war."

Of course, whether Bush goes down in history as a second Harry Truman is anybody's guess. But as our two professors from Britain do well to remind us: For all the difficulties, the American way in foreign and defense affairs has served the nation, and the world, pretty well. ♦

HELEN TANSEY

Ladies, Please

A user's guide to growing up female in America.

BY JENNIFER A. MARSHALL

"We *don't* want you wearing something that blends in with the crowd . . . *boring!* We want something that inspires!" Mrs. Hoffmann tells 45 high school girls assembled on a Saturday afternoon in Bethesda, Maryland. In black patent peek-a-boo heels and a sheer black sundress skimming the top of her knees (and this from her maternity wardrobe), Mrs. Hoffmann, 37, makes a convincing pitch.

Girls Gone Mild
Young Women Reclaim Self-Respect and Find It's Not Bad to Be Good
by Wendy Shalit
Random House, 352 pp., $25.95

This is Pure Fashion, a program that emphasizes virtue and dignity as it cultivates modesty and life skills. "Remember, many girls are pretty, but few are radiant," Mrs. Hoffmann tells her protégées.

I recently led a workshop on public speaking, and now it's time for the group's *fashionista* to assess girls' outfits for next month's fashion show. Besides the no-wallflower rule, each must meet Pure Fashion modesty guidelines and suit the individual girl. "Grow some thick skin real quick," Mrs. Hoffmann advises as the girls prepare for their consultations.

These "Pure Fashion divas," as Wendy Shalit calls them, are among the countercultural heroines she champions in *Girls Gone Mild*, her second book. Thick skin is a prerequisite for this rising generation of activists—girls engaged in what Shalit calls a "postmodern battle for decency." In a culture that seems "to have lost the ability to say that some toys, clothing, songs, or programs are simply inappropriate for children," Shalit's *Girls* are taking matters into their own hands.

That's partly because they can't always count on the adults around them to uphold decent standards, Shalit explains. Baby boomer parents who fought for sexual freedom assume their children will make the most of it. According to surveys from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, adults were more likely than teenagers themselves to think teens are embarrassed to admit being virgins. College professors' crude treatment of sexuality and high school teachers' low expectations don't help, either.

Wendy Shalit

"Far too often, it's the adults who are saying we can't accomplish our dreams, and they expect us to fail

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instead of encouraging us to aim high," observes one teen.

With cultural consensus lowering the bar, standing up for modesty becomes an act of defiance. *Girls Gone Mild* pays tribute to young women who have tangled with corporations and campus authorities to challenge the status quo. One such heroine is Ella Gunderson, who at age 11 appealed to Nordstrom for more modest clothing selections. It began with a shopping trip with her mother, 13-year-old sister Robin, and friends. When Robin tried on jeans that they agreed were too tight, they asked for the next size up—only to have the Nordstrom clerk advise them, "No you don't want *that* size, you want the smaller size, the tighter size, because it's The Look."

That didn't sit well with Ella. She wrote a letter to the company (her mother didn't find out until Ella asked for help addressing it) expressing frustration at clothes cut too tight and too low and clerks too narrow in their concept of fashion. "I think you should change that," Ella told Nordstrom.

A few months later—while the Gundersons were helping produce a local Pure Fashion show—they were surprised to receive two apologetic responses from the company. Ella's letter and the Nordstrom responses were added to press kits prepared for the fashion show. Soon the story made the front page of the *Seattle Times*. Radio and television interviews followed, including an interview on the *Today Show*. *Today*'s Katie Couric also interviewed Pete Nordstrom, who acknowledged receiving such complaints from other teenage girls for some time. A question raised at a stockholder meeting pressed the matter further with the company: "What do you plan to do about the Ella Gunderson issue?"

In a separate episode, a Pittsburgh-based group of girls launched a "Girlcott" of Abercrombie & Fitch T-shirts that were sexually suggestive and otherwise demeaning ("Do I make you look fat?"). When the company invited the group to its Ohio headquarters, one of the girls charged company reps with "neglecting their social responsibility." The Girlcott attracted nationwide attention and the participation of thousands of girls. It also achieved changes (at least temporarily) at Abercrombie: A&F pulled the shirts, and its inventory soon included a tee touting "cute and classy."

Abercrombie is notorious for playing on sex in its merchandise and advertising, but it is no longer exceptional in that regard. Sexualized marketing targets younger and younger audiences. One of many troubling outcomes, Shalit observes, is that when everything is sexy, it trivializes sex: "There is no longer any mystery or power to sex—it is just expected that everything will be sexual, and so nothing is. There is nothing to wait for, or to look forward to."

Shalit argues that young people should be taught 'that sex is significant and that it has emotional consequences.' By college, many young women have reached that conclusion the hard way and are looking for 'more romance and less explicitness.'

Instead, Shalit argues, young people should be taught "that sex is significant and that it has emotional consequences." By college, many young women have reached that conclusion the hard way and are looking for "more romance and less explicitness." Casual sex hasn't gotten them where they'd like to be. Most women are looking for a lifelong union with a man who appreciates them as a whole person, and hooking up leaves them feeling hollow. "In seeking a soul mate, it's helpful not to forget your own soul," writes Shalit.

Still, "setting high standards for your romantic life takes a lot of confidence." That's part of what prompted Cassy DeBenedetto and other Princeton undergraduates to found the Anscombe Society in 2005. The group supports students who are steering clear of the casual sex culture to pursue a life characterized by chastity before marriage. Similar groups have been launched on other campuses.

These and other young women are proof that the revival Shalit called for in her popular first book, *A Return to Modesty*, is underway. For the subjects of *Girls Gone Mild*, modesty "derives from knowing the true worth of something." As one high school student in Los Angeles described it, "Modesty is about having an internal approach to life." And for those who would misconstrue such an "internal approach" as sexual repression, Shalit sharpens the point:

> We continually malign the good girl as "repressed," while the bad girl is (wrongly) perceived as intrinsically expressing her individuality and somehow proving her sexuality. . . . [O]ur war against sexual repression always seems to require another sort of repression, of feeling and caring.

"Could it be that badness requires more suppression of individual preferences than goodness ever did?" Shalit asks. Contrary to some feminists' beliefs, modesty doesn't have to mute individuality. In fact, says Shalit, one of the reasons modesty appeals to the girls in Pure Fashion is that "it showcases their individuality." As Elsa Hoffmann charges her suburban Washington girls, what they learn about individual dignity and self-respect is not just for them, but to influence everyone in their circle.

Girls Gone Mild is a rally cry for more young women to reclaim their rightful dignity and respect, swamped by the tide of radical feminism and the sexual revolution. For all of us, the example of Wendy Shalit's young leaders calls for "rediscovering our capacity for innocence, for wonder, and for being touched profoundly by others." ♦

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Things Fall Apart

A woman's world is suddenly complicated.

BY DIANE SCHARPER

Isabel Fonseca's first novel begins with a bang as health columnist Jean Hubbard opens a pornographic letter addressed to her husband, Mark. Reading the salutation, "Dear Thing 1," as well as references to "Sexy Beast," "Naughtyboy," and "filthy old man," Jean finds it difficult to put the letter down.

She can hardly believe that the letter is referring to her 53-year old husband. As far as Jean (who's nearing 46) knows, she and Mark have a satisfying relationship, even though they are frustrated at times by conditions on St. Jacques, a tropical island in the middle of the Indian Ocean, where she's taking a sabbatical. With the knowledge she's gleaned from this letter, she now questions the stability of her marriage.

Attachment
by Isabel Fonseca
Knopf, 320 pp., $23.95

As with most first novels, the story possesses some similarity to Fonseca's real life—a situation made intriguing by the reputation of Martin Amis, her husband. Like Jean Hubbard, Fonseca is an American-born 46-year-old (former) columnist who divides her time between London and Uruguay, with frequent visits to her roots in the United States.

Told through the eyes of the protagonist, Jean Hubbard, *Attachment* works on the principle of an unreliable point of view. As Jean sees it at first, there's no reason to think that Mark's been involved with other women: The head of a successful London advertising agency, he would have no time for such peccadilloes. But why would he make so many trips back to London? And why would he have mysteriously strayed from a conference he was attending a few years previous? What about the relationship he had long before Jean and Mark met?

Mark was only 17 when he fell in love with a French beauty who left him for another man. Complicated by a pregnancy, which may or may not have involved Mark, the affair ended with the birth of a daughter, Sophie, who is now in her late twenties and who might be a lesbian with an unseemly interest in Victoria, Mark and Jean's 19-year-old daughter. Jean isn't sure because Victoria lives in London where she's finishing college.

Adding to Jean's worry over Victoria is a possible diagnosis of breast cancer. Since the results of her mammogram are inconclusive, the island's doctors suggest she go to London for further tests. To make matters worse, Phyllis, Jean's mother, arrives—ostensibly for a maternal visit, but actually to let Jean know that her father has been having mini-strokes and will need surgery. In addition, Phyllis tells her that her father's infidelity many years earlier was the reason that she divorced him. Now, Jean, who always looked up to her father, really begins to distrust her husband.

The pattern seen throughout the novel goes like this: An incident occurs; it can be anything from finding the aforementioned letter to noticing the style of Mark's hair to remembering a comment that seemed slightly out of place. As Jean muses over the incident, the plot takes one small step forward, then goes back or sideways to fill in the context. The trouble is that the story tends to lose momentum, something which Fonseca tries mightily to sustain through a plethora of complications—everything from reminiscences of 9/11 to a blackout in New York (which endangers her father) to her own missed connections with Victoria. Half-seen events are misinterpreted; half-heard conversations lead to misunderstandings. Misunderstandings multiply and grow out of proportion.

Instead of confronting Mark directly, Jean gives her imagination full rein. At an email café, she initiates a correspondence with the author of the letter, a 26-year-old named Giovana, who seems to think that she is receiving a message from the filthy old man of her dreams.

Soon Jean has to leave what was once her island "paradise" to go back to London for a medical consultation. From London, she travels to New York and her father's hospital bed, where his condition has worsened. In both cities, she continues to email Giovanna, all the while fuming at Mark. As a tension reliever, she has an explicitly detailed one-night stand with Dan, sexual predator *par excellence*—and one of Mark's colleagues. She also reheats to boiling a former relationship that she had with Larry, one of her father's law partners.

Lest *Attachment* degenerate into a romance novel, Fonseca inserts numerous literary allusions. She liberally quotes lines from Philip Larkin's poetry and from his memoir. She makes several lengthy references to Milton's "Paradise Lost," as she puns the notion of losing her island paradise home as well as the paradise of her marriage and her own state of innocence, and Mark's. About halfway into the story Fonseca alludes to the plot of *Othello*, suggesting not too subtly that the circumstances of Mark's letter may have been a setup similar to the circumstances surrounding Desdemona's strawberry-embroidered handkerchief—with, perhaps, Dan or Sophie or even Larry as Iago.

The reader gets it right away, but Jean doesn't. It's only on the final pages that Jean understands what's going on. But by then, this story of aging and adultery has begun to seem like an overly long game of "He loves me; he loves me not." ♦

Diane Scharper is editor of the forthcoming Reading Lips and Other Ways to Overcome a Disability.

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Chinese Lesson

The other side of life in the People's Republic.

BY ELLEN BORK

Last December, public security officials in Beijing picked up the writer Liao Yiwu to prevent him from attending an informal dinner where he was to receive an award from the Independent Chinese PEN Center, a small but staunch group of writers and intellectuals who defend freedom of expression inside the People's Republic.

The Corpse Walker
Real Life Stories: China from the Bottom Up
by Liao Yiwu
Translated by Wen Huang
Pantheon, 336 pp., $25

In remarks he had intended to deliver, later published by the *Paris Review*, Liao paid tribute to "my enemies, my teachers." They were hunger, into which he was born during the famine which accompanied the Great Leap Forward in the early 1960s; the lack of a residential permit, an instrument of totalitarian control, a status he first acquired when his father, a teacher, was arrested during the Cultural Revolution; homelessness while drifting around the country; and prison, where he spent four years for writing an epic poem, "Massacre," about the crushing of the 1989 Tiananmen democracy protests.

With bitter irony, Liao explained that he has repaid the "kindness" of his government by interviewing more than 300 victims of its persecution. One version of these interviews was banned in China. *The Corpse Walker* collects 27 of these encounters with a public latrine attendant, street musicians, a member of Falun Gong, crooks, a leper, political outcasts, a self-proclaimed emperor, and others. Transcripts of interviews might make for tedious reading, but these are not. Liao's style is unobtrusive and Wen Huang's editing, translation, and introductions enhance the material. The result is a set of authentic and engrossing stories.

Death and suffering at the hands of the regime suffuse *The Corpse Walker*. "The Tiananmen Father," whose own education was cut short by political campaigns, warns his son not to get involved in the democracy movement of 1989: "One minute, the Party seems to relax its political control. Once you let down your guard, they come out to get you." After the young man stops writing letters home, the family waits.

> We were in a state of feverish fear, like ants crawling on a hot tin pan. . . . Initially, the government media called the student demonstrations a patriotic movement. Then, on April 26, the *People's Daily* carried an editorial, calling the movement a riot. Those bastards!

Informed that his son had been killed, the father goes to Beijing but is not allowed to take the body home. Students' cremations are expedited so the Party can cover up their deaths. To this day the regime classifies the protesters as counterrevolutionary criminals, refuses to account for the deaths, and keeps a dozen in jail nearly 20 years after the massacre. The father manages to take photographs of the body, which show several bullet wounds and a gash from a bayonet. When he tries to ensure the correct spelling of his son's name on the paperwork, the overworked crematorium clerk becomes agitated: "Just stop pestering me, OK? I haven't slept for two days. I don't even have time to take a shit. Don't worry, I won't mess up."

It is difficult, but not impossible, to resist being dehumanized by the party and its ideology. "The Rightist" cared for a woman whose father was a landlord and uncle a Nationalist official: "We used to hear phony stuff like 'So-and-so has been nurtured by the Party and the People.' What do the Party's breasts look like?" Forced to choose between love and a future in the party, he chooses love. Expelled from the party, he tracks down his beloved in remote Xinjiang and raises a family with her. "I have to say that right now I'm pretty contented," he tells Liao.

For some, however, the toll of the party's misrule is too monstrous. "The Retired Official" explains the disastrous planting methods and a cover-up that leads to massive starvation in the Great Leap Forward. Local officials assigned to prevent stealing of food in Sichuan spot smoke from a peasant's chimney: "We just boiled our three year old daughter," says the peasant. "It was better for us to sacrifice her to save the rest of the family. We just hope she would reincarnate into something else in the next life. It's too hard to be a human being."

The title comes from stories Liao has heard about "corpse walkers," people hired to return bodies to their home provinces for burial. Liao remained skeptical until an old family friend assured him the stories are true. In the 1950s, he tells Liao, "I was strolling along the village road when a bulky, black object suddenly passed me, sending a chill down my spine. The thing was covered with a huge inky-colored robe." A guide walked ahead with a lantern, strewing fake money to ease the way into the next world. Underneath the robe "there are two bodies: the corpse and a living person who carries the dead one on his back."

Does the corpse walker of the title represent the Chinese people, carrying the putrefying corpse of the Communist party, or the souls of its dead victims? It's not hard to see why the party has found an enemy in Liao. Unlike him, however, it does not see its enemies as teachers. ♦

Ellen Bork works on human rights at Freedom House.

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Up in the Sky

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's an angst-ridden superhero!

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Earlier this summer, *Iron Man* grabbed the glum superhero-movie genre by the lapels, shook it a bit, and shouted, "Lighten up!" Over the past two decades, ever since director Tim Burton had set his 1989 smash-hit *Batman* inside a shadowy Art Deco nightscape, and featured the fast-talking comic powerhouse Michael Keaton sporting a self-pitying silent scowl for two hours, movie superheroes have mostly been tormented, gloomy, and neurotic—which is odd, really, considering their remarkable abilities, though perhaps less odd considering that these movies are aimed almost entirely at teenage boys.

The Dark Knight
Directed by Christopher Nolan

This was taken to its limit in 2003 when *Hulk* became an insanely Freudian tale about a father who briefly turns his infant son into a monster, then returns 20 years later to turn him into a monster again, and is finally killed by his own son the monster. Even when a superhero movie goes for a light touch, as the first two *Spiderman* ones did, it comes at the expense of the protagonist, who is not allowed to enjoy his talents or take advantage of them but must suffer comic humiliations because of those gifts.

Audiences went wild for *Iron Man* precisely because the movie dispensed with angst and made the following points: (1) It's fun to be very rich. (2) When you're very rich, you can build all sorts of fun toys, including a robot suit that flies and shoots things. (3) When you're very rich and you have a robot suit, you can use it to fly halfway around the world and kill terrorists.

John Podhoretz, editorial director of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

Iron Man came out in May. Now, only two months later, the neurotic gloom is back with a vengeance. *The Dark Knight* is the second movie in the new series that was inaugurated a few years ago with *Batman Begins*. It runs two-and-a-half hours and, as its length suggests, my, my, my is it serious—the way a teenager's earnest essay about the threat of global warming is serious. *The Dark Knight* carries within it the distinct sense that levity of any sort is a mark of unwelcome frivolity.

It is a study of Corruption with a capital C—the corruption of the spirit, the corruption of the soul, corruption in business, police corruption, and human corruption. Batman is in danger of being corrupted by the pleasure he takes in his vigilantism. The city's only honest cop runs a unit penetrated by the mob. A noble district attorney must face the temptations of greed.

Indeed, so corrupt is Gotham City that the only perfectly honest person there is its villain, the Joker. He takes it upon himself to test everyone's patience, sanity, and willingness to act for the common good. He is a purely negative force, and as embodied by the magnificent young Australian actor Heath Ledger, he is one of the most terrifying villains the screen has ever seen.

He's a talky villain, though, full of philosophical ruminations about the nature of evil and crime and duality and vengeance. On and on he goes, while everyone just stands around and listens to him blather. The good guys are not always available to deal with the Joker because they are in another part of Gotham City, listening to the incorruptible new district attorney (Aaron Eckhart) delivering yet another in an endless series of lectures about heroes and the need for them and the quest to defeat evil.

As for Batman, he doesn't have much to say, and what he does say is delivered in a raspy basso that makes him sound like Ezio Pinza with strep. When he gets into a debate about the nature of corruption—and he does, several times, with the DA and the Joker, not to mention Michael Caine and Morgan Freeman, who are along for the ride—you really hope his interlocutor will stop for a second and offer him a lozenge.

Ledger, who killed himself a few months after shooting was completed, is so powerful a presence that he throws the movie entirely off-kilter. It is full of nerve-jangling life when he is on screen, and it's hollow when he's off. There are other problems with *The Dark Knight*—particularly one involving a device that turns all cell phones into some kind of sonar system.

"No man should have this kind of power," intones Morgan Freeman, but since the "power" in question makes everything look like a bad architectural sketch, it's hard to understand why he would resign in protest from Bruce Wayne Industries over it. The career crisis of Freeman's character is of a piece with the didactic tone taken by *The Dark Knight*. Its makers seem to forget that it's a movie about a man who goes out at night wearing a black rubber hat. ♦

Heath Ledger

WARNER BROTHERS

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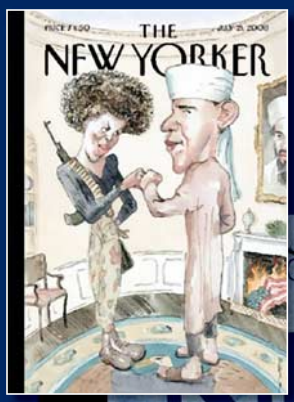
Parody

Democrat Barack Obama's campaign complained July 13 about the* New Yorker *magazine's satirical cover depicting him and his wife as flag-burning, fist-bumping radicals.
—News item



THE NEW YORKER

AUGUST 4, 2008

SPECIAL REPENTANCE ISSUE!
(WE ARE REALLY, REALLY, REALLY, SORRY)

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